

Hafa Adai!

Saipan Tribune

CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

Volume XVIII, Issue No. 355

TUESDAY DECEMBER 23, 2008

www.saipantribune.com 50¢



OPINION METER

This week's poll:
Would you favor the
use of nuclear energy
as an energy source in
the CNMI if it were
shown to be safe?

Let your voice be heard!
Go to
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84 without a
government
budget for
DAYS FY 2009

INSIDE



Greek Women

A woman's place has never been just in the home—not even in ancient Greece.

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CUC DISCONNECTION SCAM

Ex-CUC employee found guilty

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

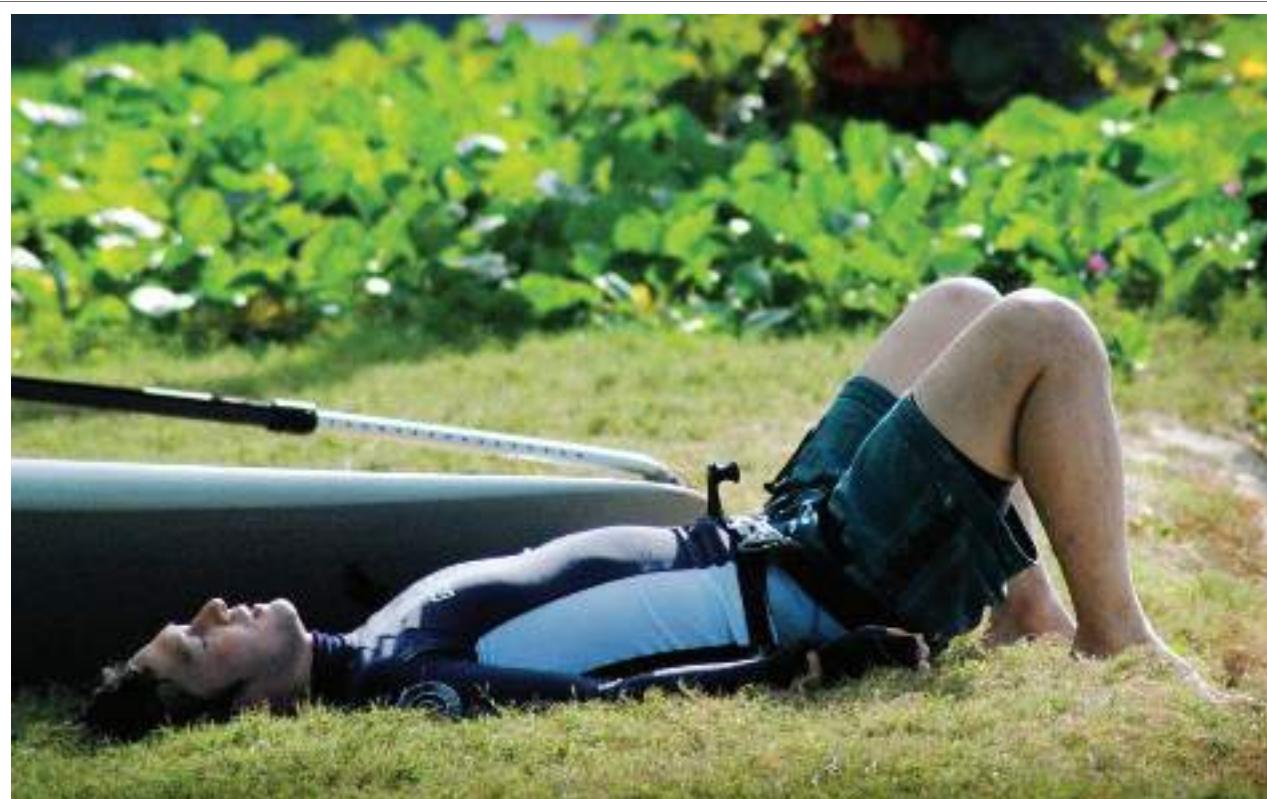
One of the five former Commonwealth Utilities Corp. employees accused of being part of a disconnection scam has been found guilty of one count of violation of the CUC Code.

CNMI Superior Court Associate Judge Ramona V. Manglona found Francisco F. Faisao guilty in a decision issued yesterday.

Manglona set the sentencing for Feb. 4, 2009.

Faisao could spend a maximum of five years in prison.

See EX-CUC on Page 4



PIT STOP

A tourist rests for a while at the beach side of the Hyatt Regency Saipan after a vigorous round of windsurfing.

SAIPAN TRIBUNE

Fitial supports phase out of poker machines

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Gov. Benigno R. Fitial supports the Governor's Strategic Economic Development Council resolution that seeks the elimination of all poker machines, except those at licensed casinos, in the CNMI



Fitial

by June 30, 2009.

Press secretary Charles Reyes Jr. said Fitial just told him yesterday morning that he

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File photo shows a signage along a Saipan highway advertising a poker arcade and a Laundromat.

SAIPAN ZONING OFFICE



By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

Unpopular decisions, including a possible tax increase, may have to be made if the Retirement Fund verges on bankruptcy, according to a senior lawmaker.

Senate President Pete P. Reyes said the Legislature would have to find a way to

See UNPOPULAR on Page 4

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Local

2 in UMDA lawsuit convicted in NY trial

Trial in Saipan civil suit now scheduled for August 2009

Robert Pfaff and John Larson, two primary defendants in an ongoing civil case brought by United Micronesia Develop-

ment Corp. on Saipan, were

convicted on multiple counts of tax evasion by a federal jury in New York in a verdict an-

nounced Dec. 16, 2008.

Jose Lifoifoi, chairman of the UMDA board of directors, said: "UMDA is pleased to see

that the jury held Mr. Pfaff and Mr. Larson accountable for their federal crimes. These two men also have caused millions of dollars in harm to UMDA, to its shareholders, and to the people of Micronesia, and we look forward to the upcoming trial for these acts [on] Saipan."

Pfaff and Larson had been on trial in federal court in New York for the past two months on charges of fraud, tax evasion and conspiracy in *U.S. v. Stein*—a case that was once characterized as the largest criminal inquiry into tax fraud in the history of the United States.

In April of 2007 UMDA filed

a civil suit against Pfaff, Larson, and a number of their associates in Superior Court of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to recover millions of dollars for harm done to the company over a 10-year period ending in 2006. The court recently scheduled trial to begin in August 2009.

Pfaff is also under separate criminal indictment in the New York federal court in a case that is not yet scheduled for trial. This second indictment relates to Pfaff's alleged global criminal activities that include the misuse of UMDA accounts and assets. It corroborates many of the key allegations made by UMDA against Pfaff and his co-defendants in the civil suit.

"UMDA looks forward to going to trial next year and recovering the assets that rightly belong to

UMDA shareholders," said Lifoifoi. "[The] defendants' attempts to delay the trial based on Mr. Pfaff's and Mr. Larson's criminal problems are a smokescreen to keep the truth from coming out and to avoid being held accountable for their actions."

UMDA was founded in 1966 in Saipan. Over the years, UMDA has been involved in a wide range of businesses, including airlines, cable systems, shipping, and resort properties. UMDA's shareholders include the government or governmental entities of the CNMI, Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, and thousands of individual Micronesians and their families. In December 2007 UMDA announced the purchase from JAL Group of the Hotel Nikko Saipan, a 313-room luxury hotel in Saipan. (*UMDA*)



MHS DONATION

The Marianas High School Class of 1978 donates a \$1,000 check to MHS principal Karen Borja. The class read about the efforts of the school to provide much needed supplies such as toilet paper and was compelled to assist MHS with this effort. Picture shows, from left, Viola DLGuerrero, Jessica Barcenas, MHS acting assistant principal; Bobbie Sablan, Vicente M. Sablan, MHS Class of 1978 president; MHS principal Karen Borja, Herman P. Sablan, and Juan I. DLGuerrero.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

In April of 2007 UMDA filed

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

Rep. Oscar M. Babauta has introduced a bill that seeks to establish a special account for the operations of the Department of Public Safety's Fire Division.

Under the proposed measure, the Department of Finance will create a Fire Safety Enhance-

ment Account to ensure that adequate funding is readily available for the operational, interisland travel, and training expenses of the inspection and investigation section of the Fire Division.

Under the current Commonwealth Fire Safety Code, the Fire Division is mandated to issue permits and conduct inspections to provide effective

fire protection to persons and property in the CNMI.

At present, funding for the operations of the Fire Division is appropriated from the annual budget law.

Babauta said that due to the importance of timely critical services being rendered, it is necessary to establish the special account.

Babauta's legislation will give the Fire director—in consultation with the DPS commissioner—expenditure authority for revenues generated with respect to fire laws.

The funds deposited into the special account may only be expended for the inspection and investigation section of the Fire Division for operational expenses, training and hiring of personnel, and interisland travel for investigative assistance.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL NO. RF09-055

OFFICE SPACE RENTAL – TINIAN

OPENING DATE: December 23, 2008

INTERESTED PARTIES MAY PICK UP THE SPECIFICATIONS AT THE NMI RETIREMENT FUND OFFICE ON TINIAN, LOCATED IN SAN JOSE VILLAGE, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS (8:00 A.M. TO 5:00 P.M., MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY, EXCEPT CNMI HOLIDAYS).

CLOSING DATE: January 22, 2009

This is to inform our readers and the Commonwealth community that the *Saipan Tribune* **will not** be published on **Dec. 26, 2008**, and **Jan. 2, 2009**, to enable its employees to observe the holidays on Dec. 25 and Jan. 1. Your understanding in this matter is greatly appreciated.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Hafa Adai!

Saipan Tribune
CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER



DISCONNECTION NOTICE

PTI would like to remind its customers that payments not received by close of business on December 23rd, will result in temporary suspension of all telephone services after 6:00 p.m. on that day. To prevent temporary suspension, customers must pay their bills on or before December 23rd.

THIS WILL BE THE ONLY NOTIFICATION PTI CUSTOMERS WILL RECEIVE*.

Per an earlier announcement, PTI is no longer mailing out past due notices as of 11/01/06.

* You have the right to dispute this notice. You must state your claim in person or in writing no later than December 23rd. You must pay any amount not in dispute to avoid disconnection. Payment denotes acceptance of all charges.

If you have questions regarding billing or service please call Customer Service at **682-4PTI (4784)** or visit our Customer Service Representatives at our Chalan Lau-Lau Office.



Prioritize the hiring of local immigration agents—House

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

The House on Friday unanimously passed a joint resolution that asks the U.S. Department Homeland Security to ensure that local Immigration employees and U.S. citizens in the Commonwealth be given priority when hiring in the CNMI.

The lawmakers made minor amendments to the wordings before voting for the passage of the resolution, which was introduced by Rep. Diego Benavente and co-signed by seven other representatives.

Rep. David M. Apatang said there is nothing wrong with the resolution as the House is only asking for consideration in the federal government's hiring decisions.

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection has already posted job announcements for

Customs and Border Protection Officer Field Operations, listing the CNMI as a duty location.

The requirements and procedures in place for hiring under this job announcement, the resolution says, appear to be inconsistent with the mandate of Public Law 110-229 (federalization law) as they do not give any priority consideration to local Immigration employees.

Thirty-seven CNMI Immigration employees will reportedly be automatically eliminated from consideration because of the 37-year-old age cutoff.

The resolution requests Delegate-elect Gregorio Sablan to communicate with the Department of Homeland Security to seek priority hiring considerations for CNMI Immigration employees and U.S. citizens and national applicants for jobs relating to the federalization of local immigration.

The lawmakers sought for a waiver of the 37-year-old age limitation and removal of the physical testing and training requirements for current CNMI immigration employees.

Immigration Director Melvin Grey told *Saipan Tribune* last October that the Homeland Security has already announced the hiring of customs and field operation officers who will be stationed in the CNMI, but there is no special consideration to make local immigration officers a priority.

Grey said that, because of the hiring qualification criteria, less than 20 of local immigration officers may qualify.

He noted that one of the criteria is that persons cannot occupy a law enforcement position in the federal government if they are 37 years old or older.

The CNMI has 72 Immigration employees, including three at the U.S. Passport's Office.



JOETEN DONATION

Another charitable contribution from Joeten Motors. Here, Frances Demapan, president of Joeten Motors, and Matthew Deets, general manager, present a check donation to Lynette Villagomez, principal of the William S. Reyes Elementary School and some WSR students yesterday, Dec. 22, at the Joeten Motors offices.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

No bail for deportable FSM citizen

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

Superior Court Associate Judge David A. Wiseman has denied bail for a deportable alien who was convicted of a felony in 2002.



Douglas A. Philip was ordered by the court to be deported and he was remanded to the custody of the Department of Corrections.

Wiseman ordered the Division of Immigration to assist Philip on any matters such as packing his personal belongings before his departure from the CNMI.

Assistant attorney general Katie Busenkell represented the government during the bail hearing yesterday morning.

In an affidavit filed by Immigration investigator Erwin T. Flores, the respondent was convicted of assault with a dangerous weapon on July 29, 2002.

Record also showed that the Superior Court issued an order of deportation against Philip on April 4, 2006.

The respondent appealed to the Supreme Court, arguing that he is not an alien based on the Commonwealth Entry and Deportation Act.

The Supreme Court issued a slip opinion on Jan. 30, 2008, affirming the trial court's decision that Philip is a deportable citizen.

Flores also stated in his affidavit that a query of the Border Management System indicated that the respondent has not departed the CNMI.

Due to the nature of the alleged charge and/or conviction of the respondent, investigators found reason to believe that he will attempt to elude service, therefore they requested an arrest warrant.

The affidavit said that Philip has failed to comply with the terms and conditions of his entry, thus he is deportable alien based on CNMI laws.

Happy Holidays Christmas Specials from Palms Resort Saipan

Christmas Eve December 24, 2008

Christmas Eve Dinner Buffet at fresko

6:00 pm - 9:00 pm

\$25.00 Adult / \$15.00 Child * Local discount 20% applicable * San Roque Club & Buddy Card Welcome

Christmas Special Teppan-yaki Dinner Course at Kaenju

6:00 pm - 9:00 pm

\$120.00 per person * Local discount 20% applicable * San Roque Club & Buddy Card Welcome

Christmas Special at PauPau Bar

5:00 pm - 10:00 pm

\$2.50 for Beer and glass of wine (red / white)

Christmas Day December 25, 2008

Christmas Day Brunch at fresko

11:00 am - 2:00 pm

\$25.00 Adult / \$15.00 Child * Local discount 20% applicable * San Roque Club & Buddy Card Welcome

Christmas Special Teppan-yaki Dinner Course at Kaenju

6:00 pm - 9:00 pm

\$120.00 per person * Local discount 20% applicable * San Roque Club & Buddy Card Welcome

Christmas Special at PauPau Bar

5:00 pm - 10:00 pm

\$2.50 for Beer and glass of wine (red / white)

Holiday Package Menu ~ January 3, 2009

[PACKAGE A \$45.00]

(Serves: 3 ~ 4 people)

[PACKAGE B \$95.00]

(Serves: 6 ~ 8 people)

* Reservation at least 2 days in advance.

Roasted Turkey with Stuffing
Cranberry Sauce
Gravy Sauce
Dinner Roll
Mash Potato
Cheese Cake

Christmas Cakes ~ January 3, 2009

Chocolate Mousse Cake

Vanilla Mousse Cake

Chocolate Tarte

All cakes,

7.2" / 18cm \$26.00

8.4" / 21cm \$33.00

* Reservation at least 3 days in advance.

* San Roque Club 20% discount applicable



For reservation or more information, please call 322-3311 *

Palms Resort Saipan

Perry: CNMI not only destination feeling crunch

By MARK RABAGO
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
ASSISTANT EDITOR

The CNMI is not the only tourist destination feeling the effects of the ongoing Japanese recession and the recent depreciation of the Korean won.

This, according to Marianas Visitors Authority executive director Perry Tenorio, who returned to Saipan early Saturday morning after being part of the Asiana Airlines' inaugural Osaka-Saipan flight.

"The CNMI is not alone in feeling the effects of the Japanese recession and devaluation of the Korean won. Any country that relies heavily in tourism should be worried. There's a lot of concerns out there [that] people, instead of spending their money on travel, may be saving it because of the situation right now," he said.

Tenorio, however, said the MVA

RELATED NEWS

New Palms Resort manager sees bright prospects in 2009.

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"I guess there's a lot of hope and this goes back to the membership meeting when chairman [Jerry] Tan said that there's a question mark in the future of tourism. We will continue to do what we need to do and at the end of the day it's really up to these people. Hopefully they have

enough resources to travel and if they do, I hope they choose the CNMI over other destinations," he said.

Tenorio's comments come on the heels of a Japan Travel Bureau report showing a 9.5-percent drop in Japanese outbound travel in the fiscal year that ended in October.

According to the report published in the *Minaichi Daily News*, sales from group tours and agent-planned tours decreased 12.2 percent and 9.8 percent, respectively, from October

2007 to October 2008.

"For the popular LOOK JTB Tours, the number of participants dropped 11.1 percent from a year ago, outpacing the drop in sales, due to slugging demand for Hawaii, Guam/Saipan, and North America despite good demand for Asian destinations."

The report went on to say that JTB's booking levels are a highly indicative benchmark of Japanese travel trends as the group handles over a fifth of the outbound market, which is 22 percent in October.

The Korean won, meanwhile, has fallen more than a quarter against the dollar this year.

Coordinator and trainer: Adelaida M. Lim

Trainers: Bona Angeles, Imelda Bautista

Principal: Rose A. Tejada

Golden Harvest shows golden performance

Students of the Golden Harvest International School once again reaped numerous awards during the Math Court Competition held Dec. 13, 2008, at the Koblerville Elementary School.

Below are winners bringing home the 1st, 2nd and 4th place awards:

NUMBERS

Advance Kinder-5

1st, Renz Guiller Fauni, Ramhae Awit, Holly Sarah Liban, Faith Bocago
2nd, Lizelle Anne Prado, Nicole Victoria Santos, Uzziel Cobacha, Daphne Cruzat
3rd, Aldraine Galang

First Grade
1st, Kennedy Luther Vila

Second Grade

2nd, Alfie Madlambayan, Gizelle Ivy

FITIAL

From Page 1

is willing to support the poker phase out as requested by SEDC.

"He is supporting the SEDC resolution to ban poker in the CNMI except at licensed casinos," said Reyes in an interview.

He said the governor agreed with the reasons cited by SEDC in passing the resolution.

SEDC co-chairs Robert Jones and Marian Aldan-Pierce and assistant co-chairperson Teresa K. Kim urged Fitial and legislators in the resolution to work collaboratively to enact laws for the orderly phase out of poker machines, except inside licensed casinos, in the Commonwealth.

UNPOPULAR

From Page 1

keep the Fund floating, responding to a *Saipan Tribune* query whether the Legislature has a contingency plan in place should the Retirement Fund go down.

"If there's a need to raise taxes then at that very time when the situation is necessary to be addressed, the Legislature may make some unpopular decisions," the senator said.

He, however, underscored the need to stop the "in-house fighting."

"This is counterproductive for the administrator of the Retirement Fund to continue attacking the government. Instead of working with us to try and address this problem, we don't need this attack. We need to work together and find a solution to the problem and one of the solutions is floating a rev-

Leong

2nd, Enming Cadac, Allan Tzady Calangi

Third Grade

1st, Emmanuel Cobacha
2nd, Francesca Fauni

Fourth Grade

2nd, Tiffany Madlambayan
3rd, Isa Belle Seman

ALGEBRA

Advanced Kinder-5

1st, Aldraine Galang, Holly Sarah Liban
2nd, Faith Bocago, Nicole Victoria Santos, Ramhae Awit, Uzziel Cobacha
3rd, Daphne Cruzat
4th, Lizelle Anne Prado

Second Grade

2nd, Alfie Madlambayan, Enming Cadac

3rd, Corin Mercado



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Golden Harvest International School students pose for a group picture after the Math Court Competition held Dec. 13, at the Koblerville Elementary School.

SHELL

From Page 1

fuel as of 12:01am this morning, Dec. 23. Shell's average market cost of Regular Unleaded, V-Power, and Diesel fuel products have continued to ease allowing Shell to pass the savings onto our customers."

Based on previous figures, Shell's move brings pump prices on Saipan to \$2.83 a gallon for regular unleaded, self-served gas and \$2.96 a gallon for regular, unleaded gas with full service. Premium, or Shell "V-Power," gas prices fell to \$3.15 a gallon self served, and

\$3.37 a gallon with full service. Diesel prices came down to \$3.60 a gallon.

Shell last cut its prices on Dec. 10 also by 15 cents.

There was no immediate word if Mobil Oil Marianas will also lower its prices but the two companies have traditionally mirrored each other's price movements. Mobil does not usually make media announcements about price changes.

Meanwhile, the average price of regular gasoline Friday was \$1.66 a gallon across the U.S. This after the average fell 9 cents in the past two weeks, bringing it to its lowest point in nearly five years, according to a national survey.

EX-CUC

From Page 1

Earlier, Manglona dismissed three charges against Faisao after he and four other ex-CUC staff were accused of engaging in a scam by purposely skipping the names of family members and friends from a power disconnection list.

The charges dismissed included one count of theft of services and two counts of conspiracy to commit theft of services.

The dismissal came after the Attorney General's Office moved to drop the charges with finality.

Faisao, who was represented by counsel Edward Arriola Sr., was accused of getting a sum of \$1,096.85 in the scam but he pleaded not guilty to the charge.

It would be recalled that on May 24, 2007, authorities arrested former CUC employees, including a supervisor who, in exchange for cash, allegedly pocketed money to reconnect individuals who have been disconnected or to keep the power on for delinquent accounts and were also allegedly skipping the names of family members and friends from the power disconnection list.

edly conspired to reconnect individuals who have been disconnected or to not disconnect delinquent accounts. The scheme resulted in a loss of over \$300,000 for CUC.

The others accused were former CUC administrative support assistant Manuel Q. Camacho (for allegedly stealing over \$1,000 that was intended for payment of a company's power bill), credit and collection supervisor Elaine Q. Terlaje, customer service representative Rita I. Tarope, disconnection crew members Ricardo C. Sablan, Joaquin E. Norita and Faisao.

Terlaje, Tarope, Sablan, Norita, and Faisao were accused of conspiracy to commit theft and misconduct in public office.

Accordingly, the suspects were pocketing money to reconnect individuals who have been disconnected or to keep the power on for delinquent accounts and were also allegedly skipping the names of family members and friends from the power disconnection list.

venue bond," Reyes said.

The Senate president said a Fund bankruptcy is possible, but that it is not just because of the CNMI government's inability to pay its mandated employer contributions.

"It is also because of the economic situation nationwide and internationally. The Fund just lost several millions of dollars from its investment. And those were contributing factors. It's not just the inability of the government to pay," he pointed out.

What if the government pays off all of its unfunded liability and the market crash happens, then the Fund would still lose everything, he added.

"Those possibilities exist as we can already see. Where would they [Fund] go?" Reyes asked.

Right now, the senator said, he supports a bill to float a revenue bond that would address the need for the government to fully pay off its liabil-

ties to the Fund.

"Those are ideas that we can do and we can dedicate a source funding to repay the bond. So floating a revenue bond is a good idea," he said.

Reyes said the Legislature needs to make sure that the Fund does not go bankrupt.

The Fund's assets have been reported on a downslide since 2006. In that year, the central government stopped contributing to the pension program, forcing the Fund to liquidate assets to make pension payments.

In fiscal year 2008, the Fund withdrew \$35 million, with approximately half of that amount needed to pay retirees.

In September 2008, a stock market crash reportedly wiped out \$30 million of the Fund's investments. But after a week in the same month, the Fund's losses went down to \$9 million as the market recovered.

'Junk \$250M price tag for CUC privatization'

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

Rep. Heinz S. Hofsneider has sought the removal of a provision in the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. privatization law that requires the successful bidder to pay \$250 million.

Hofsneider's House Bill 16-204 also defines what entities will qualify as a "U.S. certified contractor" for purposes of assisting CUC in the bidding process and to further clarify which entities may qualify to participate in CUC Private Sector Assistance Agreements.

Hofsneider noted in his bill that it is necessary to amend Public Law 16-17, called the CUC Private Sector Partnership Act of 2008, "to provide greater clarity and to create a greater probability of obtaining reliable power at a reasonable rate for the people of the Commonwealth."

The lawmaker said the impact of requiring a successful bidder to purchase 100 percent of CUC's assets and operations for power generation and pay-

ing \$250 million would likely result in more expensive power for the CNMI.

He said this provision in the law should be modified "in such a manner that preserves

the Commonwealth's interest in shifting from fossil fuels to alternative energy sources."

Under a new provision proposed in the legislation, a contract for an independent power

producer may be awarded for a term not to exceed 25 years, provided that any IPP contract for more than 10 years and CUC retains the right, at any time prior to expiration of such contract, to buy out the remainder of the

able energy requirements of the privatization law.

"An IPP may contract for the use of fossil fuel only in electric power generation for no more than 10 years and CUC retains the right, at any time prior to expiration of such contract, to buy out the remainder of the

contract at fair market value if a reasonable source of alternative energy becomes available to the Commonwealth," according to the bill.

The privatization law was enacted after the Legislature overrode Gov. Benigno Fitial's veto on the bill.

BoG names calendar winners

HAGATNA, Guam—The Bank of Guam has announced the winners of its 6th Annual 2009 Calendar Contest. Bank of Guam President and Board Chair Lou A. Leon Guerrero made the announcement, presented awards and distributed check prizes at the bank's headquarters on Dec. 11, 2008. The bank's 2009 calendar was also presented to the public for the first time.

The contest's theme was "Keeping Our Islands Green," and the bank employees voted their selections. Winning photos are awarded \$250 for the cover and \$150 for each month.

The Bank of Guam prints 15,000 copies of its 2009 calendar, which is distributed throughout its branch network to customers at no charge. The calendar is also sent to deployed troops, courtesy of Guam Del-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

egate Madeleine Z. Bordallo.

To view the winning photos, log on to the Bank of Guam's website www.bankofguam.com. (PR)

From left to right, and the months their winning photo is featured: Gabriel M. Lapid, George Washington High School 12th Grader (February); Jermaine Sanders, Asmuyao Community School 9th Grader (June and October); Mari Awata, Academy of Our Lady of Guam 12th Grader (July); Raenate Santos Sebastian, George Washington High School 12th Grader (Cover); Lou Leon Guerrero, Bank of Guam president and board chair; Joel Atenta, George Washington High School 12th Grader (March); Rhea Ann Patino, Simon Sanchez High School 12th Grader (November); Crystal Navarette, Simon Sanchez High School 11th Grader (August). Those not present were Ceidree Janae Duenas, Southern High School 12th Grader (January and September); Karla Alfonso, Harvest Christian Academy 12th Grader (May); Dmitri Villanueva, Mindzenty High School 9th Grader, Palau (April); and Janelle R. Blas, Rota High School 12th Grader (December).

EMO issues warning vs high waves

Waves between 9-11 feet are expected to occur today until Thursday on the heels of a trade wind surge that is keeping winds and seas at or above the small craft advisory threshold.

In a notice issued yesterday, the CNMI Emergency Management Office is advising the public to avoid venturing near reefs and exposed beaches as wind and wave conditions support dangerous rip current. Rip currents are life threatening to anyone entering the water.

A small craft advisory for winds was in effect through yesterday afternoon, while a small craft advisory for hazardous seas was in effect from yesterday evening through Thursday afternoon.

Based on information received from the National Weather Service in Tiyan, Guam, last night's east wind was at 20 knots. Winds waves were 7 feet, with east swells of 5 feet.

From today until tomorrow, Wednesday, east wind is forecasted to be at 20 knots, with winds waves at 7 feet and east swells of 7-8 feet. Tomorrow night and on Thursday, east wind is forecasted at 15-20 knots, with wind waves of 6 feet, and east swells of 7-8 feet. On Friday, east wind is forecasted at 15 knots, wind waves of 5 feet, mixed swells east of 6-7 feet and northwest 3 feet. On Saturday, east wind is forecasted at 15-20 knots, with wind waves of 6 feet, east swells of 6 feet, and north 3 feet. (*Saipan Tribune*)

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*To enjoy "My Family Connects" Value Plans, current iConnect subscribers must transfer to a family plan of equal or higher value. Each additional member can choose between \$25, \$36, \$40, \$45 & \$50 plans up to 4 members per family plan. New subscribers must purchase a plan for \$40 per month and each additional member can choose from the various family plans. FREE i415 phones for i415, i425 & i425+ plans & FREE i426 phones for \$40, \$45 & \$50 plans. 24 month contract required. Prices exclude applicable local & federal taxes & fees. Credit approval apply.

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Court orders release of man in theft case

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
n_rodriguez@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Superior Court has ordered the release of a man involved in

a burglary case after he promised the court that he would appear at all scheduled hearings.

Associate Judge David A. Wiseman issued the order on

Dec. 18, that Hilario Angui, a resident of Koblerville, be released on the condition that he will return to the court wherever required to do so and obey all

Commonwealth laws.

Record showed that Angui has a previous criminal history of arrests and convictions in numerous in burglary and

theft incidents.

The next hearing to review Angui's case was yesterday but there were no available documents.

According to an affidavit of probable cause in support of the issuance of a warrant of arrest filed by Detective Kevin R. Maratita on Nov. 11, 2007, Angui was identified in footages from a security camera at the Commonwealth Health Center where two laptops were stolen on Sept. 21, 2007.

The two laptops were stolen from the offices of Dr. Richard Brostrom and Isidro

R. Ogarto, which contained patient information and were estimated at a value of \$4,000 for both laptops.

The surveillance camera revealed footage of Angui entering the Department of Public Health. He was also seen leaving the premises with a box tucked under his left arm.

One of the laptops was later returned to Ogarte. Angui allegedly stated that the other was given to a friend who was with him during the time of the burglary.

He was ordered to pay a bail of \$20,000.

NMC students cited for community projects



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Recipients of the Service Learning Program's Certificate of Service pose for a photo with NMC president Dr. Carmen Fernandez.

Students of the Northern Marianas College were recently recognized for their efforts in conducting community presentations on topics ranging from federalization to the delegate race.

The group included students from the political science and current issues classes of Sam McPhetres, as well as from

various classes of NMC's School of Education and Nursing Department. Collectively, there were a total of about 205 students involved in the community projects.

Students from McPhetres's classes presented on various topics, such as the Commonwealth's energy crisis, the impacts of the federal takeover,

and the proposal for the marine monument. The college's nursing students volunteered during the Disaster Preparedness Month and administered free blood sugar and blood pressure checks. SOE students engaged in many tutoring and teaching practicum activities at the public elementary schools.

The Service Learning Pro-

gram at NMC combines academic instruction with service to the community. The program provides students the opportunities to conduct service to their community as part of their academic experience. Students can earn classroom credits while serving in a variety of agencies and organizations. (NMC)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Marianna Franchesca Leimwalcep Dela Cruz, center, celebrates her third birthday today, Dec. 23. She is shown here with Calvin and Kai-lana. Greeting from your mom Ruth and your family from Saipan and Arizona.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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Fitial, Cabinet meet on \$165.4M budget

Decision may be reached on or before Christmas Day

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie.delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Gov. Benigno R. Fitial held another meeting yesterday afternoon with Finance Secretary Eloy Inos and other key staff regarding the \$165.4-million budget for fiscal year 2009 that the

Legislature recently passed. Press secretary Charles Reyes Jr. told *Saipan Tribune* last night that the meeting pushed through in the governor's office, but that there was no decision yet whether to accept or veto the proposed budget.

In an interview yesterday at

Wushin slashes prices of LPG by \$0.45 per gallon



MARK RABAGO

A staff of Wushin Corp. refills a cylinder at its Lower Base headquarters.

By MARK RABAGO
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Wushin Corp. has dropped the price of its liquefied petroleum gas products, giving consumers on Saipan an advance Christmas gift.

The Lower Base-headquartered LPG supplier decreased its prices by \$0.45 per gallon effective Nov. 27. It translates to the following cost savings for island LPG users:

- 90-gallon LPG cylinder from \$114.50 to \$106.50;
- 50-gallon LPG cylinder from \$67 to \$62;
- 40-gallon LPG cylinder from \$56 to \$52; and
- 20-gallon LPG cylinder from \$29.75 to \$27.75

"The company received a memo from its main supplier in Guam for the price decrease, which is a remarkable decrease compared to the year's price movement. The decrease was a result of [depressed] prices in the world market," the company said in a letter to clients.

Wushin said the price decrease is a boon to many of the company's commercial customers.

Shirley's Coffee Shop Susupe, for one, welcomed the drop in LPG prices.

Accountant Irene Santiago said the restaurant averages about 500

noon, Reyes said there would be more deliberations pertaining to the budget and that they expect to act on it on or before Christmas Day, the deadline for the administration to make a decision. If the governor fails to act on the budget by then, it automatically becomes law.

"We do have a number of

Felled power pole shuts down power islandwide

By KRISTI EATON
kristi_eaton@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The island experienced a 2.5-hour power outage yesterday due to a falling electric pole, according to the Commonwealth

concerns and we will be meeting to discuss budget issues this afternoon [Monday]," he said.

Reyes said the governor will be meeting with Inos, his legal counsel, Office of Personnel Management officials, and key administration staff.

"We should have an announcement and decision short-

Utilities Corp.

Preliminary information shows that an electric pole carrying primary lines in Kagman fell, which tripped Power Plant 1, 2, 4 and the Aggreko generators.

The outage started around

ly because it's already the 22nd. Christmas is Thursday. So within the next few days," the press secretary said.

Reyes told *Saipan Tribune* shortly after the Cabinet meeting last week that they actually have a few concerns about the proposed spending limit.

The press secretary said Fitial received feedback from Cabinet members and that he is going to

take these into consideration.

The Legislature passed the \$165.4-million budget for FY 2009 on Dec. 4, 2008. It includes provisions for 10.7-percent cuts against agencies funded by the central government. The proposed budget excludes the self-funding Department of Public Lands, which will get \$3.1 million, and autonomous agencies.

11:30am and lasted until about 2 pm, according to CUC.

The windy weather has been affecting the power lines, CUC said.

The last unplanned island-wide outage was more than a

month ago, when the transformer breaker at the Chalan Kiya/Waterloo substation caused engine 8 at Power Plant 1 to fail, causing a chain reaction that brought down all the engines. That outage lasted three hours.

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NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.

Newly-hired Palms Resort Saipan general manager Mustafa Issa greets guests at the launching of Peroni beer Friday night.

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING) CIVIL ACTION CORPORATION) NO. 07-420
Plaintiff,)
-v-)
CARMEN R. SALAS)
Defendant.)

NOTICE OF SALE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that, Pursuant to an Order issued by the Court in this matter on June 10, 2008, I will sell, at public auction, to the highest bidder, on the terms and conditions set forth hereinbelow, all the right, title, and interest of Defendants in and to the following property: Lot 010 K 487, situated in Dandan Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, containing an area of 870 square meters, more or less, as shown on the Division of Lands and Survey Official Cadastral Plat No. 010 K 01, dated August 19, 1987, Commonwealth Recorder's File No. 87-2913, the description therein being incorporated therein by reference.

Date, Time, and Place of Sale. The sale will be held on Friday, January 23, 2009, at the hour of 1:30 p.m., at The Law Offices of Michael A. White, LLC, Joeten Center, Susupe, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands. The sale will be open to the general public.

Terms and Conditions of Sale. The Terms and Conditions of Sale may be obtained from the undersigned, either prior to or at the sale. These terms and conditions shall govern the conduct of the sale.

DATED, this 12th day of December, 2008
/s/ MICHAEL A. WHITE, Auctioneer

New Palms Resort manager sees bright tourism prospects in 2009

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
n_rodriguez@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Despite the worldwide economic downturn, the new general manager of Palms Resort Saipan sees some bright prospects ahead next year.

Mustafa Issa, who was hired two weeks ago, explained that tourists from Japan and Korea would definitely opt for a shorter trip, instead of going to other destinations farther than Saipan.

Issa said this would be an advantage for an island like Saipan because of its proximity to Asia.

He said Saipan would be more attractive to the Japanese and Korean markets because it would be easier, quicker and nearer.

"I'm always confident that we would be able to get them here. We can assure them that they will get great value for their money. Instead of seeing a decline in visitor arrivals, we should be the ones benefiting," he said.

During a chance interview, Issa talked about some of the hotel's immediate plans.

The main goal, he said, is to plan for the future of the resort with an emphasis on how to draw the line where the resort is going to be in the years to follow.

"With the economic situation worldwide, I think that it would be to our advantage. The only thing is how to deal with it," he said.

He said they will not implement any major changes but they are committed to maintaining "the individuality of the resort as a resort and keep it as an independent hotel."

He said they plan to provide quality service not only to the tourists but also to the local community.

"There is nothing wrong about being said that we are a Japanese hotel. We still have those Japanese guests. But we also intend to look at the local

market. We are a local company and we feel that we should give emphasis as being part of the local community," Issa said.

Issa said they also intend to provide catering services but this is just one of the ways to reach to the local market.

"We are doing everything to attend to the local market like offering them special discounts and different programs," he said. "We thank the travel agents and the government for always supporting us in these trying times."

Some of the improvements to be made will be the installation of flat screen televisions and new beds.

"We will continue to stay ahead of everybody. We will do whatever we can that will help the business. We are excited to do these for the future of the hotel," he said.

He said he is confident that his team will make Palms Resort the best on the island.

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
NORTHERN MARIANAS) CIVIL ACTION HOUSING CORPORATION,) NO. 07-485
Plaintiff,)
-v-)
CYPRIANO KAIPAT BERKI and)
MELVA JUDYANN MUNA BERKI,) Defendants.)

NOTICE OF SALE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that, pursuant to an Order issued by the Court in this matter on November 28, 2008, I will sell, at public auction, to the highest bidder, on the terms and conditions set forth hereinbelow, all the right, title, and interest of Defendants in and to the following property: Lot No. 011 G 1236, situated in Kagman III, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, containing an area of 748 square meters, more or less, as more particularly described on Division of Lands and Surveys Official Drawings/Cadastral Plat No. 011 G 23, the original of which was recorded October 10, 1996, as Document No. 96-2566 at the Commonwealth Recorder's Office, Saipan.

Date, Time, and Place of Sale. The sale will be held on Friday, January 2, 2009, at the hour of 1:30 p.m., at The Law Offices of Michael A. White, LLC, Joeten Center, Susupe, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands. The sale will be open to the general public.

Terms and Conditions of Sale. The Terms and Conditions of Sale may be obtained from the undersigned, either prior to or at the sale. These terms and conditions shall govern the conduct of the sale.

DATED, this 3rd day of December, 2008
/s/ MICHAEL A. WHITE, Auctioneer

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING) CIVIL ACTION CORPORATION) NO. 06-0330
Plaintiff,)
-v-)
DOMINIQUE S. PALACIOS)
and GLORIA S. PALACIOS)
Defendants.)

AMENDED NOTICE OF SALE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that, Pursuant to an Order issued by the Court in this matter on August 15, 2008, I will sell, at public auction, to the highest bidder, on the terms and conditions set forth hereinbelow, all the right, title, and interest of Defendants in and to the following property: Lot 011 G 735, situated in Kagman III, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, containing an area of 800 square meters, more or less, as shown on the Division of Lands and Survey Official Cadastral Plat No. 011 G 14, dated December 1, 1993, Commonwealth Recorder's File No. 93-4178, the description therein being incorporated herein by reference.

Date, Time, and Place of Sale. The sale will be held on Friday, January 23, 2009, at the hour of 1:30 p.m., at The Law Offices of Michael A. White, LLC, Joeten Center, Susupe, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands. The sale will be open to the general public.

Terms and Conditions of Sale. The Terms and Conditions of Sale may be obtained from the undersigned, either prior to or at the sale. These terms and conditions shall govern the conduct of the sale.

DATED, this 12th day of December, 2008
/s/ MICHAEL A. WHITE, Auctioneer

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING) CIVIL ACTION CORPORATION) NO. 06-502
Plaintiff,)
-v-)
JOSEPH S. TAITANO)
and EMILY N. TAITANO)
Defendants.)

SECOND AMENDED NOTICE OF SALE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that, Pursuant to an Order issued by the Court in this matter on October 2, 2007, I will sell, at public auction, to the highest bidder, on the terms and conditions set forth hereinbelow, all the right, title, and interest of Defendants in and to the following property: Lot 011 G 514, situated in Kagman III, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, containing an area of 767 square meters, more or less, as shown on the Division of Lands and Survey Official Cadastral Plat No. 011 G 10, dated December 1, 1993, Commonwealth Recorder's File No. 93-4178, the description therein being incorporated herein by reference.

Date, Time, and Place of Sale. The sale will be held on Friday, January 23, 2009, at the hour of 1:30 p.m., at The Law Offices of Michael A. White, LLC, Joeten Center, Susupe, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands. The sale will be open to the general public.

Terms and Conditions of Sale. The Terms and Conditions of Sale may be obtained from the undersigned, either prior to or at the sale. These terms and conditions shall govern the conduct of the sale.

DATED, this 12th day of December, 2008
/s/ MICHAEL A. WHITE, Auctioneer

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING) CIVIL ACTION CORPORATION) NO. 06-506
Plaintiff,)
-v-)
NIEVES OLOPAI ROMOLOR)
Defendants.)

SECOND AMENDED NOTICE OF SALE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that, pursuant to an Order issued by the Court in this matter on June 27, 2007, I will sell, at public auction, to the highest bidder, on the terms and conditions set forth hereinbelow, all the right, title, and interest of Defendants in and to the following property: Lot 011 G 492, situated in Kagman III, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, containing an area of 841 square meters, more or less, as shown on the Division of Lands and Survey Official Cadastral Plat No. 011 G 01, dated December 1, 1993, Commonwealth Recorder's File No. 93-4178, the description therein being incorporated herein by reference.

Date, Time, and Place of Sale. The sale will be held on Friday, January 23, 2009, at the hour of 1:30 p.m., at The Law Offices of Michael A. White, LLC, Joeten Center, Susupe, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands. The sale will be open to the general public.

Terms and Conditions of Sale. The Terms and Conditions of Sale may be obtained from the undersigned, either prior to or at the sale. These terms and conditions shall govern the conduct of the sale.

DATED, this 12th day of December, 2008
/s/ MICHAEL A. WHITE, Auctioneer

Flashback

A LOOK BACK AT PAST YEARS' HEADLINES

December 23, 1998

PSS may cut jobs

The Public School System had escaped a 10 percent wage cut, all right, but nonrenewals of job contracts for nonteaching staff look inevitable in March. About 270 custodians, janitors, counselors and school principals would be affected if the nonrenewals go ahead. But Education Commissioner Rita H. Inos said several options are being considered in order to keep some, not all, of them. She said: "We would have some abilities to hire some back. But there would be no hiring all at one time."

Gov't to launch crackdown vs embezzlers

Gov. Pedro P. Tenorio yesterday pressed the Attorney General's Office to pursue the recommendations of the Office of the Public Auditor which called for the prosecution of government officials who were found to have misspent public funds. The governor made the call, the first since he assumed office in January, in another attempt to strengthen accountability of officials holding public office. The public auditor's office has flooded the AGO with recommendations seeking punishment of officials who have erred in the past for ignoring procurement regulations to mishandling of government money.

December 23, 2002

Rebate talks hit glitch

The Department of Finance has not printed yet all the rebate and refund checks that are supposed to be released beginning today, pending final loan negotiations with the Bank of Guam. As of press time yesterday, officials had received no confirmation yet from the bank about the release of the \$19-million loan. Sources privy to the issue said the Department of Finance began the printing of the checks Friday but they eventually stopped after the bank's legal counsel raised some issues relating to the conditions set forth in the agreement between the bank and the CNMI government.

Narita-Saipan flights begin

Continental Airlines has begun direct flights between Narita International Airport in Tokyo, Japan, and the Saipan International Airport—much earlier than the announced resumption by April 2003. Yesterday, Continental's Flight CO964 was to depart Narita around 9:30pm and was expected to arrive on Saipan about 2:05am this morning. Flight schedules posted on Continental's Internet website show daily available flights today until Christmas Day. Direct flights from Saipan back to Narita are also available from today, with departure time slated at 6pm. Continental Micronesia president and chief executive officer Mark Erwin told the Saipan Tribune that, although the Narita-Saipan direct flights were to officially start by April 1, 2003, they have decided to start such operations "immediately."

December 23, 2003

EPA opposes Sugar Dock project

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is opposed to the planned dredging and renovation of the Sugar Dock, citing potential adverse environmental impact entailed by the project. In a letter to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, EPA National Wetlands expert Thomas G. Yocom said his agency could not support the issuance of permit for the project. The EPA—the nation's premier environmental agency—took this position, as the first public hearing on the proposed project was to take place on Saipan last night.

Agencies cautioned on dredging plan

The administration has advised government agencies to be careful in their review of the proposed Sugar Dock dredging project amid massive protests from the community. Lt. Gov. Diego T. Benavente said Gov. Juan N. Babauta and himself are basically awaiting permitting agencies—Division of Environmental Quality, Coastal Resources Management, and Historical Preservation Office—to come up with their own recommendations on the project, which paves the way for a new Saipan-Tinian ferry route. "I asked agencies to review this carefully. The governor and I have basically decided to wait and see on what these agencies will be reporting," said Benavente in an interview during yesterday's scheduled ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new youth detention center in Kagman.

2008 Christmas in the Marianas



Opinion

Saipan Tribune

CNN'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

Volume XVIII, Issue No. 355

Published daily at 2/F CIC Centre,
Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, CNMI
Mailing Address: PMB 34, Box 10001, Saipan, MP, 96950

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Mark Rabago ASSISTANT EDITOR

MEMBER

AP The Associated Press

Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

South Africa's crime

South African President Kgalema Motlanthe concedes that the situation in Zimbabwe is "very dire." No doubt he's familiar with what the United Nations is reporting: that more than 1,000 people have died of cholera in a spreading epidemic, that 17,000 others are infected and that more than half of the country's remaining population requires emergency food aid to avoid starvation. Hospitals have closed, 80 percent of the country lacks safe drinking water and school attendance is down to 20 percent. Inflation was last registered at 231 MILLION percent; as a practical matter the economy has stopped. As U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon put it last week, Zimbabwe "stands on the brink of economic, social and political collapse."

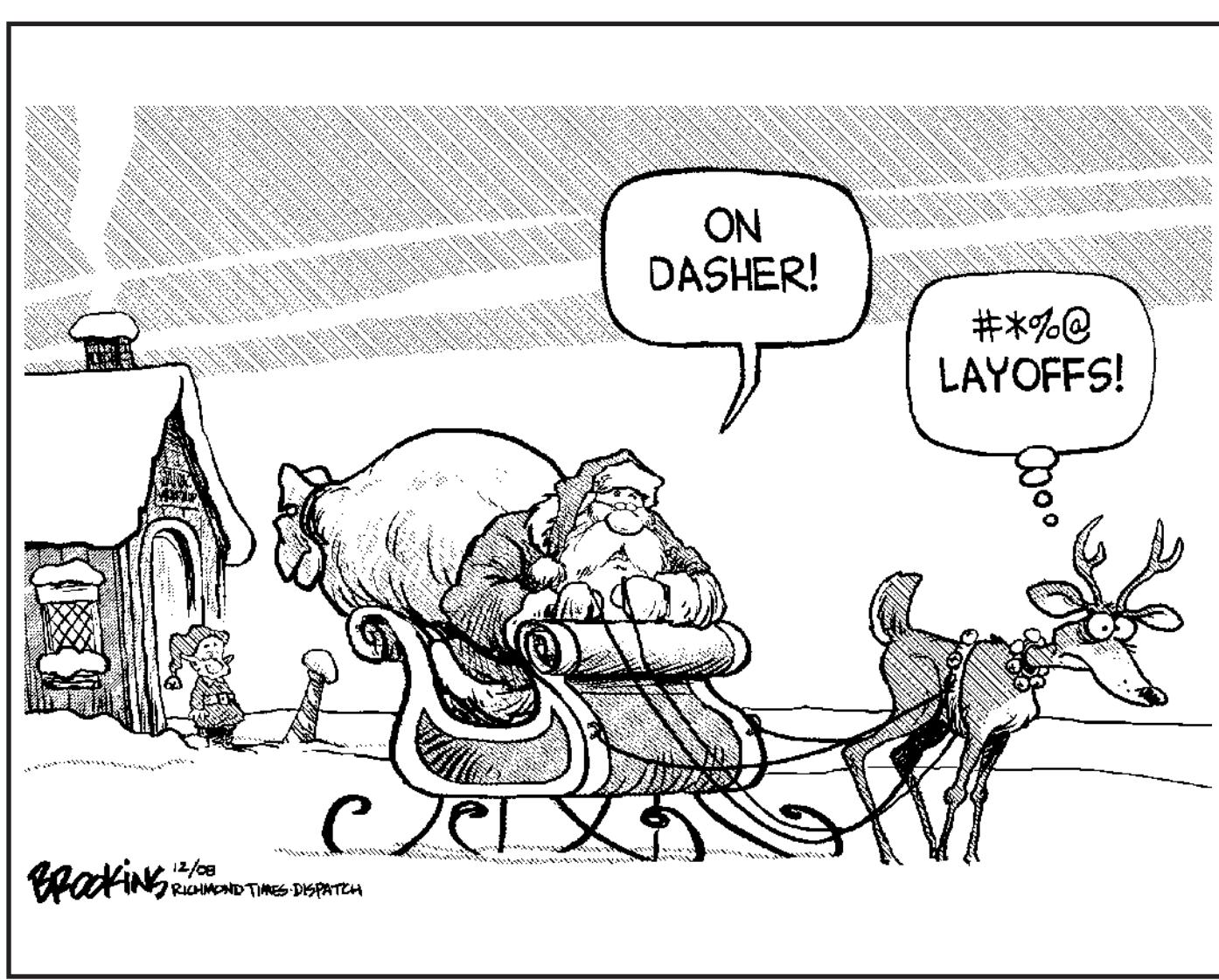
So is Mr. Motlanthe at last ready to use South Africa's considerable leverage to end the nightmare in its neighbor? Will his government finally join those of Zambia, Botswana, Kenya, the United States, Britain, France and Canada in calling for 84-year-old strongman Robert Mugabe to step down? Well, no. "It's really not for us," the president told reporters Wednesday. "I mean, I don't know if the British feel qualified to impose that on the people of Zimbabwe, but we feel that we should support and take our cue from what they (Zimbabweans) want."

Actually, what Zimbabweans want, desperately, is an end to the humanitarian emergency in their country—which can come only with Mr. Mugabe's departure. What South Africa wants is something else entirely: to resuscitate Mr. Mugabe's dying regime through a bad deal cooked up by "mediator" Thabo Mbeki, Mr. Motlanthe's predecessor. The plan calls for a "unity" government between Mr. Mugabe and the winner of last March's presidential election, Morgan Tsvangirai. Yet it long ago became clear to all but the South Africans that the formula is unworkable. Mr. Mugabe has no intention of sharing authority, especially over the military and police, which have been waging a violent campaign against the opposition. "I will never, never, never surrender . . . Zimbabwe is mine," he said Friday.

The terror apparatus is the last functioning part of Mr. Mugabe's government. According to Amnesty International, two dozen opposition activists have disappeared in the past six weeks. Mr. Mugabe lately has been claiming that the opposition is training fighters in Botswana and trying to assassinate his ministers (the air force chief was mysteriously wounded in the hand by a gunshot). The opposition believes that Mr. Mugabe may soon attempt to impose emergency rule, using those false allegations as an excuse.

The outgoing Bush administration and Britain tried again last week to have the U.N. Security Council take up this crisis. Once again they were stopped by South Africa, with support from Russia. Instead Mr. Motlanthe has announced a vague initiative by South Africa's neighbors to supply humanitarian support. What's happening here is pretty clear: South Africa, a country that aspires to continental leadership, is allowing a depraved strongman to utterly destroy a neighboring country, at a cost of thousands of lives. Mr. Motlanthe's government has the economic, political and military leverage to rescue Zimbabweans from their leader; yet it not only refuses to act but actively blocks intervention by other countries. Mr. Motlanthe, Mr. Mbeki and those in South Africa who support this unconscionable policy have become accessories to a grave humanitarian crime.

(c) 2008, The Washington Post



There's no harm in believing

When it comes to Santa Claus, my 9-year-old son is letting go in stages. The other day he made a key tactical concession.

"I've decided I don't believe that elves make all the Christmas presents," he announced. "But I do still believe in Santa himself." He spoke without catching my eye, in a tone that made it clear that the subject was now closed.

It was a poignant moment. A child warming his hands on the dying embers of make-believe, trying to delay passage into the adult world of cold, hard facts. A little boy, pulled in two directions, turning to his father for reassurance.

So how did I respond? With a parental panic attack, of course. The familiar questions came thick and fast: Were we wrong to let our son believe in Santa Claus? Will he be traumatized by the truth? Or feel so betrayed by us that he struggles to form relationships in later life?

These days, the Great Santa Debate isn't just about whether to pretend that every Christmas a paunchy old man in a red suit squeezes down millions of chimneys bearing gifts. Oh no, it goes much deeper than that. It feeds into a broader culture of parental hysteria.

Of course, earlier generations grappled with the Santa question. In 1897, the *New York Sun* published its famous editorial assuring an 8-year-old girl that "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" and life would be drab without him. But today the Santa debate seems more charged than ever. Just look at the brouhaha stirred up in the blogosphere by Macy's "Believe" advertising and charity campaign, which encourages children to write letters to St. Nick at the North Pole.

With everyone from teachers and celebrities to parents and psychologists weighing in, the battle lines in this debate are starkly drawn. One camp dismisses the Santa story as a pernicious lie that commercializes Christmas, excludes non-Christians and ruptures the trust between parent and child; the other embraces it as a bit of harmless fun that reflects the imagination and wonder of childhood. On both sides, the strength of feeling can be startling. One blogger writes that lying to your children about Santa is a "form of child abuse."

Nor is the sound and fury confined to the online world. I know a couple in Manhattan—where else?—who have hired a therapist to help their children cope with the news that Father Christmas is not real.

Santa is also a hot topic in Britain, where I live. Earlier this month, a school near Manchester fired a substitute teacher for telling a class of 7-year-olds that the jolly old man in red did not exist. A few days ago, I brought up the subject with parents at a party in London. One woman stormed off without saying a word.

By CARL HONORE

Special to The Washington Post



Carl Honore is the author of *Under Pressure: Rescuing Our Children From the Culture of Hyper-Parenting*.

"Last week, a few of us got into a really horrible argument about how to handle the Santa question," explained her friend. "Obviously she's still very worked up."

The same could be said for many parents nowadays—and not just over Santa Claus. We've already seen it with people starting fights at their children's sporting events and breaking the bank to put on the best birthday party in town. Now the same angst is swirling 'round Christmas, which instead of bringing tidings of comfort and joy now feels like yet another high-stakes test of our ability to parent.

Thanks to smaller families, greater affluence and higher expectations, modern parenting is fraught with anxiety, fear and guilt. It feels as though it's all-or-nothing out there: Your child either breezes through grade school and the Ivy League en route to a glittering career or he's a dropout sleeping rough downtown; he's an Alpha child or a loser. Make even the smallest mistake—utter a harsh word at the wrong moment or fail to nurture a talent early enough—and your child will be scarred for life.

The upshot is that we push, polish and protect our children with superhuman zeal. Think Baby Einstein DVDs and Mandarin-speaking nannies; schedules jammed with ballet, football, tutoring, tennis, baseball, piano; GPS tracking devices in the school backpack; bans on such "dangerous activities" as tag, marbles and snowball fights; grade inflation and endless self-esteem initiatives to make everyone feel good about themselves.

But much of this fretting is misplaced. Babies are not blank slates whose entire future depends on how they are parented. Each of us is born with a genetic blueprint that plays a big part in shaping our intelligence, temperament and abilities. Some experts argue that peers, teachers and the community play a larger role in shaping children than once thought.

Of course parenting is crucial, but the bottom line is that not every single thing we do as parents leaves an indelible mark, for good or ill, on our children. Kids are more resilient than that. They can handle disappointment, boredom and feeling bad from time to time—in fact, these things can make them stronger.

See THERE'S on Next Page

EDITORIAL POLICY

The *Saipan Tribune* welcomes comments on any article, column, editorial, or topic that may be of interest to the public. Letters to the editor must include the name, address, and contact number of the contributor. Letters that are critical in nature should focus on issues, not personalities. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, CIC Centre, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Funny—how things turn out

Conclusion

As mentioned in part 1 of this series, judging from recent economic events in the United States and elsewhere in the world, economics doesn't seem to make much sense to anyone anymore. Currently in the United States, the government's intervention in the markets may be termed a "bailout" now but it's still abhorrent to many taxpayers and die-hard proponents of the free market system.

Greed, stupidity and a resistance to change brought the economic disaster about. After all, many of the nation's most prominent business leaders and financiers were responsible for getting us into the current mess, with a great deal of blame also placed at the doorstep of Congress. But you already know that if you watch the nightly news.

Those of us interested in the Pacific region have watched in amazement at the phenomenal economic growth of the PRC over the past 20 years or so. While China was pursuing its growth, all the while the United States was seriously eroding its international financial standing as a result of its trade and account deficit with China and other countries. Pretty stupid if you ask me. One reaction has been that of the Chinese Premier who once stated: "We are concerned about preserving the purchasing power of the dollars we hold."

The United States was able to sustain a high standard of living most of us have enjoyed in recent years only because foreign entities such as China purchased U.S. stocks, bonds and other assets. We Americans have been enjoying a higher standard of living—which on average, we could not afford as a nation. We simply consumed more than we produced domestically. By contrast, China's population currently has a lower standard of living than they might otherwise have because the country consumes only around half of its total national production. But they have been catching up.

With the growing economic difficulties surfacing within the American economy manifested in the outsourcing of jobs; the sub-prime housing debacle; U.S. consumer debt at an all-time high; dependence on imported energy, etc., all could combine to eventually

convince the Chinese government's banking authorities to move away from U.S. securities and Treasury notes in particular and move their wealth out of declining dollar values into stronger currencies such as the euro or perhaps even a "bundle" of Middle Eastern currencies—such as an oil supported dinar if, and only if, OPEC can control the volatility of their resources. In the arid reaches of the Middle East there is only one thing you can do with oil and that's sell it—you can't drink it. They need consumers. Unlike tobacco, it's not wise to adopt pricing policies to kill your customers—unless you hate them and their "decadent materialistic Western ways." Sound familiar?

If you have been following the current high and low financial roller coaster in the U.S., Asian and European stock markets, when you cut through all the political hype being directed at us from the U.S. Congress it all boils down to Congress being "asleep at the switch" and the American voter electing incompetent politicians, many of whom, in my opinion, are guilty of "economic treason." Let's call it for what it is.

With all the advisers and resources available at their disposal, Congress should have seen the developing mess with the sub-prime debacle in the housing market coming—and the resulting "across the board" meltdown which is nothing more than a direct result of their failure to watch the back rooms and boardrooms of the banking sector early on as their policies became evident but largely ignored as manipulators of the economy. U.S. regulators should have more closely monitored predatory usury abuses in the credit card industry.

Congress should have been able to assess the impact of outsourcing America's manufacturing base and the resulting unemployment it has caused. They should have seen the long-term result of their continued failure to make the United States energy independent, a need which was first made obvious almost 35 years ago in 1973. They should have realized the harmful effects of deficit spending and the resulting U.S. debt of trillions of dollars. And on and on—with an inexcusable litany of collective political and economic neglect, including neglect of the nation's crumbling infrastructure, unfair free trade policies which, more often than

By WILLIAM H. STEWART

Special to the *Saipan Tribune*

William H. Stewart is an economist, historian, and military cartographer.



not, were not free trade at all but in reality one-way trade. Using a modified cliché, "the devalued buck must stop somewhere." It follows that it must stop with the U.S. Congress and by extension the Federal Reserve for failure to do their job in protecting the American economy. They failed to put out the fire at the first sign of smoke but they dilly-dallied and attempted to blow it out with hot air. Throw all of them out of office.

All this has had a disastrous impact on the financial condition of retirement funds around the country including the NMI.

An incredible degree of incompetence and naivete was revealed in all its dismal truth when Alan Greenspan, former chairman of Federal Reserve, stated before the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform when he admitted, "Those of us who have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholders' equity, myself included, are in a state of shocked disbelief." He certainly had a lot of people in Congress fooled with his incomprehensible economic gobbledegook. You could have sold this guy the Brooklyn Bridge.

Editor's Note: In the 60's the author served as an economic development project adviser when the State Department undertook programs to implement President Kennedy's foreign policy of encouraging the then newly emerging independent countries in Africa and Asia to use the tools of capitalism and private enterprise as implementing agents for their national economic development aspirations as a competing economic alternative to Soviet style communism and socialism. Google - saipanstewart (open on "Home").

Letters to the Editor

JR's musing

The breezy and cool holiday season is here. I've been looking around for a blanket to cover my feet. But I heard rumors St. Nick (Al Gore) came to town and collected everything. Apparently, he and doomsayers have shifted their propaganda from "global warming" to "climate change". But why would he scrooge my blanket?

■■■

At the geopolitical level, US-Sino relations were once woefully pathetic. Washington liberals would find every iota of dirt to demonize an awakening global giant, fearful of its economic prowess in Asia. It even employed human rights issues to embarrass China. This thoughtless arrogance has shifted today. China has \$1.5 trillion in reserves our country may have to borrow to pay off its huge debts. And Anti-China liberals in the US Congress may have to hush it for the next four years.

Future energy for Saipan

I have read the *Saipan Tribune* report on Dec. 19, 2008 (p.1 and 4) about the \$60 million offer by an Indian company to find solutions for the Saipan energy crisis. In this context, I wonder if the CNMI is considering investing in renewable energy sources.

In my view, opting for a gas and diesel engine-based power plant will be a sub-optimal choice because of the uncertainty over fuel prices and environmental concerns and regulations. Saipan possesses optimal natural conditions for solar, wind, biomass and wave-energy. As I know from my own consulting activities and involvement in the WFUNA Millennium Project, such small scale and decentralized renewable energy systems are especially suitable for rather less densely populated locations with tropical climate. Above this, the fuel will come practically free of charge, stable energy prices could be guaranteed and there will be no problems with the Clean Air Act.

The future will lie in renewable energy sources and Saipan would be an ideal place to invest in such solution, which will more than pay off on the mid- to long run. I also assume that it even might be possible to get scientific and technological assistance from other Asian countries, mainland US, Europe or international organizations for pursuing such undertakings. Communities on Saipan could even serve as test beds for energy innovations. And tourists could be attracted to visit the island because of its seminal energy solutions.

I have seen a parade of Atlases Shrugged during and after serving as public servants, their performance, shamefully, mediocre. This must be the result of the lack of a moral compass to serve as a beacon light so they could employ vision rather than television in upholding their oath of office. Or it may also be attributable to the inability to conquer the excesses of arrogance and ineptitude or the obvious inhibition and fear to domesticating selfishness.

■■■

A few have been able to secure their PhDs in what's known as humility, integrity, honesty and dignity. PhD stands for passionate, hungry and driven. I'd like to know what are you made of and whether your commitment is supported by a conviction to do what is right for the people you wish to represent either on the most coveted seat (governor) or as a policymaker. If you haven't received your PhD, it's time to leave entering or re-entering the political arena permanently.

■■■

The Scrooge of Christmas is here and will be around for more than a decade. How sad that we have allowed the inertia of political

Also I would like to inform you about another energy-innovation: mini nuclear power plants. This is not a joke. The garden-shed-sized mini power plants are based on technology developed by scientists of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico and can provide electricity for up to 20,000 homes. The units are sealed, use only non-weapon's grade material, are buried underground, have no moving parts and are based on designs that have been proven safe for 50 years. This makes them considerable safe. The first commercial units will be available around 2013 and some island nations and US protectorates have already expressed their interest (sources: <http://www.off-grid.net/2008/10/31/micro-nuclear-plants-for-local-power/>; <http://www.physorg.com/news145561984.html>) I would just like to suggest that).

Saipan should really and earnestly consider taking different and non-conventional paths for their energy future. You have to invest anyway, so why not looking for innovative, sustainable, suitable, affordable and long-lasting solutions? But this needs new ways of thinking and policy-making. If other countries and islands can do this, why not Saipan?

Dr. Miriam J.S. Leis

*Foresight, Technology and Policy Adviser
Den Hague (The Netherlands)*

gamesmanship to get us pinned against each other. How do we dig ourselves out of this fatal hole? The crab theory is in full bloom. And so it seems there's no hope in sight to freeing ourselves from ourselves. Thanks Scrooge for all the screwy odd balls.

■■■

Image Is Everything: CEOs of the three carmakers came into Washington in their \$20 million private jets to ask for bailouts. Too, AIG CEOs came to ask for the same while pampering themselves with over half-a-million dollar expense, including lavish dinners and golf outings. Wow! And they're expecting taxpayers to bankroll their loans? How about some sense of humility?

■■■

However Scrooge may be around on every corner, there's hope ahead if you turn to Divine Providence for sturdy guidance. *Renueba i haanen miyo yan in fan adeseha denuebo gi finatton Noche Buena yan gi hinalom i nuebo na sakan. Gagao i Niño Jesus bendision miyo 'an matto giya hamyo pago na Huebes. Felis Noche Buena yan Año Nuevo para todos man-gineflehu!*

John S. DelRosario Jr.
As Gonno, Saipan

THERE'S

From Page 1

Let's face it: Generations of children have grown up believing and not believing in Santa Claus and the world hasn't come to an end. Sure, I still feel a bit sore at the friend who pulled the wool from my eyes in the second grade, but I'm not traumatized by the memory. Nor do I feel betrayed by my parents. My wife grew up never believing in Santa, and she's fine, too.

When it comes to Christmas, and to everything else connected with children, we could all turn down the thermostat a little. Instead of freaking out about how everyone else is parenting, we need to relax and find the recipe that works best for our own families.

My wife and I have decided to let our son's belief in Santa run its course. When the time comes to face the truth, he'll be OK. The only question now is whether he can keep the secret from his younger sister.

Already there are signs that her faith in Santa will not last as long. The other day at breakfast she looked up from her toast and asked me point-blank: "Do you really think elves make all the Christmas presents?"

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam Homepage: www.pr.noaa.gov/guam/

The Weather

5-Day Forecast for Saipan and Tinian

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Partly cloudy and breezy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 20 to 25 mph.	Partly cloudy and breezy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 20 to 25 mph.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
▲87° ▾77°	▲87° ▾77°	▲87° ▾77°	▲87° ▾77°	▲87° ▾77°

Micronesia

Guam and Rota	Showers	▲83 ▾76
Palau	Showers	▲87 ▾77
Yap	Showers	▲86 ▾76
Chuuk	Showers	▲90 ▾78
Pohnpei	Showers	▲85 ▾75
Kosrae	Rain	▲87 ▾78
Majuro	Showers	▲83 ▾76

Around The Globe

Auckland	Rain	▲65 ▾60
Beijing	Mostly Sunny	▲36 ▾16
Hong Kong	Partly Sunny	▲73 ▾63
Honolulu	Mostly Sunny	▲79 ▾70
London	Partly Sunny	▲54 ▾42
Los Angeles	Partly Sunny	▲58 ▾46
Manila	Showers	▲82 ▾74
Melbourne	Cloudy	▲73 ▾53
Miami	Mostly Sunny	▲77 ▾70
New York	Partly Sunny	▲34 ▾31
Osaka	Cloudy	▲46 ▾31
Paris	Cloudy	▲48 ▾39
Pusan	Sunny	▲43 ▾25
Rome	Sunny	▲57 ▾35
Salem	Partly Sunny	▲37 ▾32
San Francisco	Mostly Cloudy	▲49 ▾43
Seoul	Cloudy	▲36 ▾28
Tokyo	Partly Sunny	▲57 ▾43
Washington, DC	Partly Sunny	▲38 ▾34

Tides

Saipan Harbor	
6:13AM Today	High Tide: 1.5 Feet
10:38AM Today	Low Tide: 1.3 Feet
3:55PM Today	High Tide: 1.8 Feet
11:43PM Today	Low Tide: 0.1 Feet

Sunrise/Sunset

Sunrise/Sunset		Moonrise/Moonset	
Today	6:39AM	5:53 PM	Today
Wednesday	6:40AM	5:53 PM	Wednesday
Thursday	6:40AM	5:54 PM	Thursday
Friday	6:41AM	5:55 PM	Friday
Saturday	6:41AM	5:55 PM	Saturday

GET YOUR PICTURES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS PUBLISHED—FOR FREE

The *Saipan Tribune* accepts for FREE publication the following:

PICTURES

■ ISLAND SNAPSHOT Birthdays, baptisms, christenings, family gatherings, reunions, club activities, and other community-related events.

■ BIRTHDAY GREETINGS A way for families and friends to greet their loved ones, accompanied by a picture of the person celebrating his/her birthday.

■ BUSINESS Corporate donations, volunteer work, promotions, granting of awards, team-building exercises, meetings and other activities by members of the business community.

■ SAMUT SARI Pictures from the islands' Filipino community, primarily focusing on Filipino activities, gatherings, get-togethers, volunteer work, etc.

■ TRAVELOGUE Pictures of off-island travels. Contributors may submit up to 10 pictures for consideration.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

■ COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Announcements of upcoming activities of organizations, community clubs, government agencies, and private companies.

■ CAMPUS BULLETIN Announcements of upcoming activities in public and private schools, as well as calendar of activities. May include PTSA meetings, enrollment procedures.

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For pictures:

■ Photos should be original and not copyrighted. Contributors must have the right to allow the *Saipan Tribune* to publish the pictures.

■ Digital pictures should be high-resolution (minimum of 800kb).

■ Must have complete details (who, what, where, when), the name of contact person, and phone number.

■ Photos must have been taken in the last two months.

■ For birthday greetings, must be submitted no later than 12 noon of the previous day to make it to next day's edition.

For announcements:

■ Must have complete details (who, what, where, when),

the name of contact person, and a phone number.

■ Must be submitted no later than 12 noon to make it to next day's edition.

HOW TO SUBMIT

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■ Fax: (670) 235-3740

■ Mail: PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan, CNMI 96950

■ Drop off: 2nd Floor, CIC Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan

To check if contributions are received, call (670) 235-6397, 235-2440, 235-8747

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■ The *Saipan Tribune* will decide how often community announcements are going to be published.

■ For Travelogue, the *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to choose which pictures to publish.



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- Call 234-7272 (PARA) on any telephone
- *11 on any PTI cellular phone
- Log on to the internet at www.nmicrimestoppers.com

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SUBSCRIPTION Published Monday to Sunday, *Saipan Tribune* offers door-to-door on-island delivery at an annual rate of \$182. Off-island subscription rate is \$376 per year. For additional subscription information, call (670) 235-8747 or 235-2769, or fax 235-3740.

ADVERTISING For inquiries contact (670) 235-2769. E-mail: sales@saipantribune.com

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 20, 2008

DEPARTURES

Saipan-Rota

CO9597 11:50am 12:25pm 1,7

Saipan-Guam

CO9317 5:00am 5:50am Daily

CO9313 8:30am 9:20am Daily

CO9597 11:50am 1:20pm 1,7 via Rota

CO9601 12:30pm 1:20pm 2,3,4,5,6

CO9603 3:30pm 4:20pm Daily

CO9605 6:30pm 7:20pm Daily

CO9599 9:30pm 10:20pm Daily

Saipan-Narita

NW 099 5:00am 7:40am Daily

NW 078 8:25am 1:30pm Daily

NW 075 4:55pm 7:30pm Daily

Saipan-Osaka

OZ 119 4:00am 6:40am 1,4,6

NW 083 4:30pm 7:20pm Daily

Saipan-Nagoya

NW 078 8:25am 11:05am Daily

Saipan-Incheon

OZ 604 2:10am 6:00am 1

OZ 604 2:40am 6:30am 2,3,4,5,6,7

OZ 606 3:20pm 7:00pm Daily

Saipan-Busan

OZ 608 3:50am 7:20am 1,4,5,7

Saipan-Shanghai

FM 844 2:50am 5:40am 2,6

Rota-Guam

CO 9597 12:50pm 1:20pm 1,7

Guam-Manila

CO 893 5:50pm 9:10pm 3,5 via Koror

CO 933 8:00pm 9:40pm Daily

PR 111 6:00am 7:50am 1,2,4,6,7

Editor's Note: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); CO: Continental; FM: Shanghai Airlines; PR: Philippine Airlines; NW: Northwest; OZ: Asian

ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. The *Saipan Tribune* is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)

FREEDOM AIR FLIGHT SCHEDULE

Airline ETD ETA Frequency

Guam-Rota

FRE 113 11:40am 11:50am Daily

FRE 115 1:00pm 1:10pm Daily

Rota-Saipan

FRE 117 2:30pm 2:40pm Daily

Business

Retailers launch final holiday sales push

CHICAGO (AP)—Swirling snow, packed parking lots and massive markdowns greeted many shoppers across the country this weekend as retailers tried to woo consumers to open their wallets during the final holiday countdown.

From flagship department stores to main street shops, consumers found extended hours—in some places, around-the-clock shopping—and even some extra-cheery customer service as merchants hope to salvage one of the worst shopping seasons in decades, brought on by the recession and growing economic uncertainty.

"They're really trying to get you in there," said Raleigh, N.C., resident Kim Rardon, who was surprised by the price cuts she saw while searching for gifts on Saturday at Crabtree Valley Mall in north Raleigh.

For those willing to spend, the deals abounded.

In Miami, Ana Solis bought T-shirts from the Disney Store featuring Kermit the Frog and



A shopper passes "sale" signs as she walks past a store window during a snowstorm Friday, Dec. 19, 2008 in New York.

a cashmere blanket for more than half off. "It's been a great day," he said.

But not for Ahmad Parpia, the store manager of Marquise Jewelers inside Dallas' Valley View Mall, who's seen his most profitable period of the year fizzle out. Few shoppers are coming inside his four stores to buy diamond-encrusted chains, gold watches and jewelry, despite signs advertising: "Financing available up to \$10,000. Will beat any competitive price."

"It's almost like 80 percent down over the last two years," he said. "I've never seen before a Christmas like that, and I've been in this business almost 15 years."

The International Council of Shopping Centers expects established stores to post their worst performance for the holidays since at least 1969, when its index began. It predicts same-store sales, or sales at stores open at least a year, will fall as much as 1 percent for the November and December period, and fears the decline could even be steeper.

SEC has been slow to react to fraud claims

WASHINGTON (AP)—Before his downfall in an alleged fraud that may end up costing investors \$50 billion, Wall Street money manager Bernard L. Madoff circulated a promotional message extolling his service to clients.

"Customers know that Bernard Madoff has a personal interest in maintaining the unblemished record of value, fair-dealing and high ethical standards that has always been the firm's hallmark," Madoff proclaimed in a brochure designed

to drum up more business.

The brochure called attention to the high-tech trading side of his business that was supposedly honestly run and legitimate, but it also offers a glimpse of why the Securities and Exchange Commission was unable to stop Madoff in his tracks despite repeated warnings.

As financial markets have grown increasingly complicated—which was the case with this part of Madoff's operation—the SEC has struggled to keep up with the changes.

As economy falters, more people giving up pets

A growing number of Americans are giving up their dogs and cats to animal shelters as the emotional bonds between people and pets get tested by economic ones.

From the Malvern, Pa., man who turned his two dogs over in order to help pay for his mother's cancer treatments,

At the flagship Macy's store on 34th Street in New York, shoppers swarmed racks offering 65 percent off women's clothing.

Elsewhere, the store was offering 50 percent off handbags by designers such as Dooney & Bourke and Coach and 40 per-

cent off gold earrings.

Thirty-eight-year old Chris Moscardelli found even deep discounts when he snagged

Cheney says Congress failed struggling automakers

WASHINGTON (AP)—Vice President Dick Cheney blamed Congress for failing to bail out the auto industry, saying the White House was forced to step in to save U.S. car companies.

In an interview broadcast Sunday, Cheney said the economy is in such bad shape that the car companies might not have survived without the \$17.4 billion in emergency loans that President George W. Bush approved on Friday.

"The president decided specifically that he wanted to try to deal with it and not preside over the collapse of the automobile industry just as he goes out of office," Cheney said in an interview broadcast on "Fox News Sunday."

Lawmakers "had ample opportunity to deal with this issue and they failed," Cheney said. "The president had no choice but to step in."

Congress rejected an auto



In this Nov. 6, 2008 file photo, Vice President Dick Cheney applauds President Bush during an event at the White House in Washington.

bailout package after many Republicans and some Democrats

opposed it. Some said U.S. auto companies would be better off if

they were required to reorganize through bankruptcy. Cheney leaves office Jan. 20 as one of the most powerful, if unpopular, vice presidents in recent history. He played a key role in many of Bush's major policy decisions and, in the interview, was unapologetic in his review of the past eight years.

He staunchly defended the Bush administration's use of executive power in the fight against terrorism and disagreed with calls to limit presidential authority. "If you think about what Abraham Lincoln did during the Civil War, what FDR did during World War II. They went far beyond anything we've done in a global war on terror," the vice president contended.

Cheney said he was unconcerned about polls showing him as unpopular, saying that people who spend too much time reading polls "shouldn't serve in these jobs."

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Gas down to \$1.66 per gal., lowest in some 5 years

CAMARILLO, Calif. (AP)—The average national price of gasoline fell 9 cents in the past two weeks, bringing it to its lowest point in nearly five years, according to a national survey released Sunday. The average price of regular gasoline Friday was \$1.66 a gallon, oil

industry analyst Trilby Lundberg said. The price of mid-grade was \$1.80 a gallon and the price of premium was \$1.92 a gallon. The last time gas prices dipped so low was in February 2004, Lundberg said, when the national average for

Wall Street looks for year-end rally

NEW YORK (AP)—Investors head into a holiday-shortened week with optimism that recent moves to prop up the ailing auto industry and slash interest rates might trigger a year-end rally. Like the deep discounts luring holiday

shoppers to the malls, the steep drop in stocks over the past year has made many blue chip shares more attractively priced. And big institutional investors might use the last seven trading days of the year to snap up some bargains. The downturn that began in October 2007 spread through the entire market in the past year and damped widespread demand for all but the safest investments, particularly government bonds. With the benchmark Standard & Poor's 500 index down 40 percent in 2008, investors are hopeful about a rally in the past month and wondering what to expect next year. Even if investors stream into the market, it still might not be enough to save what is expected to be one of

Wall Street's worst years on record. Volume is expected to be light in a week shortened by the Christmas holiday and an early close on Christmas Eve.

Ohio GM plant closing to leave 1,080 workers idle

MORAINES, Ohio (AP)—General Motors Corp.'s financial woes have GM workers around the country worrying about what life without GM might be like. The 1,080 hourly workers at the automaker's sport utility plant in this Dayton suburb are about to find out. For them, life without GM begins Tuesday. That's when the automaker pulls the plug on the plant that over the past 27 years has spit out cars, trucks

and SUVs, helped pay mortgages and college educations, and provided a security blanket in turbulent times. "The news was devastating at first," said Jackie Wilson, a 39-year-old mother who has spent 15 years at the plant. "It's all I've known." GM and other U.S. automakers are mired in a sales slump because of the economic downturn, tight or nonexistent credit, and lack of consumer confidence. So far this year, GM alone has announced 11,000 U.S. layoffs. Stress on the workers at the Moraine plant has been mounting since June, when GM announced it would close the plant because high gasoline prices were driving consumers away from the SUVs made there.

Nations

Firefighter: Miracle no one died on Denver runway

DENVER (AP)—It was a miracle that no one was killed when an airliner veered sharply off a runway during takeoff, burst into flames and nearly broke apart, firefighters said Sunday.

There was no official word on the possible cause of the crash of Continental Flight 1404 at Denver International Airport, which injured 38 people. Cockpit and voice recorders were recovered and appeared to be in good condition,

the National Transportation Safety Board said Sunday.

The entire right side of the Boeing 737-500 was burned in the Saturday evening accident, and melted plastic from overhead compartments dripped onto the seats. Investigators said the plane's left engine was ripped away along with all the landing gear.

"It was a miracle ... that everybody survived the impact

and the fire," said Bill Davis, an assistant Denver fire chief assigned to the airport. "It was just amazing."

A crack encircled much of the fuselage near the trailing edge of the wings, Davis said.

Davis, one of the firefighters who rushed to the scene, said the plane came to a rest about 200 yards from one of the airport's four fire stations. Passengers walked out of the ravine

in 24-degree cold and crowded inside the station, he said.

The 110 passengers and five crew members left the plane on emergency slides, officials said.

Passenger Emily Pellegrini told The Denver Post that as the plane headed down the runway, "It was bumpy, then it was bumpier, then it wasn't bumpy."

Gabriel Trejos told KUSA-TV in Denver that the plane buckled toward its middle and

that the seats felt like they were closing in on him, his pregnant wife and his 13-month-old son, who was on his lap. His knees were bruised from the seat in front of him.

Maria Trejos told KUSA

that there was an explosion and that the right side of the plane, where they were sitting, became engulfed in flames. The family used an emergency exit and slid down the wing of the jet to the ground.



The wreckage of a 737 Continental plane sits at Denver International Airport on Sunday, Dec. 21, 2008.

Questions linger in deadly San Diego jet plane crash

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Two weeks after a Marine Corps plane slammed into a San Diego residential area, killing four people, questions have arisen about the decision to direct the hobbled fighter over homes to an inland airfield when a nearby base offered a route across open water.

The cause of the fiery Dec. 8 crash is still being investigated. Military officials have depicted a chain of events in which first one engine failed on the F/A-18D Hornet—and then the second quit while the pilot was attempting to reach a landing spot.

It could turn out to be "a one-in-1 million occurrence," Joe Kasper, a spokesman for Rep. Duncan Hunter, the ranking Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, said Thursday.

However, the rarity of the double engine failure hasn't dampened speculation that the deaths of four members of one family might have been averted. The pilot ejected safely. Marine generals have defended the choice to send the Hornet to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, taking

it over the University City neighborhood where the crash incinerated two homes, damaged three others and killed four members of one family.

The Miramar base is ringed by freeways and bordered on its western end by thickly packed residential areas that include a high school.

Less than 10 miles away, however, the Naval Air Station North Island in Coronado sits at the tip of a peninsula and the flight path from the south crosses San Diego Bay.

"Why not go to North Island?" asked Louis Rodolico, who lives near the Miramar base.

"All we're saying is when you have a damaged aircraft, don't bring it over a populated zone, especially when you have a world of options," Rodolico said.

Retired Navy Cmdr. Rick Ramirez, who lives near Miramar, said at a community forum last week that the pilot could have easily flown the plane to North Island, but it would have been an inconvenience for Marine maintenance crews to retrieve the crippled aircraft.

III. impeachment panel awaits word from prosecutor

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP)—The legislative committee considering impeachment of Gov. Rod Blagojevich could be at the beginning of its work or nearing the end, depending on the wishes of federal prosecutors.

If prosecutors give the OK, the Illinois House committee will explore the federal criminal charges against Blagojevich by interviewing his aides, reviewing documents and questioning witnesses to the actions that led to Blagojevich's arrest.

However, some committee members say they expect U.S.

Winter's opening day packs a punch to northern US

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP)—Weekend storms in the nation's northern half knocked out power to thousands of customers Sunday and created nighmarish conditions for holiday travelers coast to coast on the first official day of winter.

Gusty winds in the Midwest, where wind chills dipped to minus 30 or lower, produced whiteout conditions that contributed to at least two vehicle pileups, in Wisconsin and Michigan.

And blizzard warnings were issued for parts of Maine, where up to 24 inches of snow was expected. Forecasters warned that strong wind could create whiteout conditions and deep drifts.

"This is a classic nor'easter," said meteorologist John Can-

non. "It's got all the features."

Parts of Iowa and Illinois were under blizzard warnings. Power was knocked out to more than 35,000 customers Sunday in Illinois shortly after being restored to most who had lost it after a storm last week, utilities said.

Chairwoman Barbara Flynn Currie, a Democrat like the governor, wouldn't go quite so far. She said new issues could still come up and prolong the committee's work, which began Tuesday.

The committee, which is sup-

posed to produce a recommendation on whether lawmakers should pursue impeachment, hopes to hear Monday what limits prosecutors will suggest. Members have repeatedly said they will do nothing that prosecutors say would interfere with the Blagojevich investigation.

Lawmakers said they'll also hear testimony Monday on state jobs and contracts that Blagojevich gave to major campaign donors and on how prosecutors obtain permission to eavesdrop on their targets. Federal wiretaps are an im-

portant part of the case against Blagojevich, and his attorney has questioned their validity.

The governor was arrested Dec. 9 on a variety of federal corruption charges—including scheming to benefit from his power to name President-elect Barack Obama's replacement in the U.S. Senate.

involving at least 30 vehicles Sunday in southwestern Michigan on Interstate 94, a major route between Chicago and Detroit, officials said. At least one person was seriously injured in the crash, which shut down six miles of eastbound lanes north of Stevensville, state police said. At least a dozen vehicles were involved in a pileup Sunday on Interstate 43 in Wisconsin's Ozaukee County that briefly shut down southbound lanes. Some people were injured, the sheriff's office said, but it wasn't clear how many.

Even hardy Minnesotans buckled to the cold, calling off a Minneapolis holiday parade Sunday that is automatically canceled if the wind chill dips below 20 degrees.

Wind gusts up to 35 mph blew snow and contributed to a crash

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Tests on dust samples have revealed some of the highest arsenic levels in the country—as much as 460,000 times the level deemed safe by the federal government. But while the poison can cause cancer in people and harm wildlife, little has been done to remove the costly waste here or similar hazardous waste at thousands of other abandoned mines around the nation. "Worst case scenario, we'll have to clean up everything, which could do more environmental damage than leaving it and monitoring it," said Richard Forester, who oversees the Rand Mining District cleanup for the Bureau of Land Management. Forester and others worry that particles of arsenic scattered by the area's stiff wind could be slowly poisoning the estimated 300 residents of Randsburg, Johannesburg and Red Mountain.

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ACROSS THE NATION

Desert wind blows health risks from Calif. mines

RANDSBURG, Calif. (AP)—Heaps of toxic mine waste rise like church steeples over this wind-swept desert town, threatening the health of residents and of thousands of off-road bikers.

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liberating Monday. The jury worked on the case for nearly seven hours on Sunday. It was the fifth day of deliberations. There were no notes or other requests during Sunday's deliberations. The jury asked for two transcripts in the first four days. The five defendants are all foreign-born Muslim men who lived for years in a Philadelphia suburb. They're charged with conspiring to kill military personnel and attempted murder. They would face life in prison if convicted of those charges. None of the men testified in their trial, but their lawyers say they were not plotting anything.

Magnitude-4.1 quake shakes central California

HOLLISTER, Calif. (AP)—Geologists say central California has been shaken by an earthquake measuring magnitude-4.1, strong enough to be noticed but without producing any reports of damage or injuries. The U.S. Geological Survey said the Sunday morning tremor was centered eight miles south of the unincorporated town of Tres Pinos, about 97 miles south of San Francisco. It was focused at about four miles beneath the surface. A dispatcher for the San Benito County sheriff's office said the quake was felt, but no one complained of any damage or injuries.

Asia

Targeted Mumbai hotels open with tighter security

MUMBAI, India (AP)—The blood has been mopped up, the grenade-scarred marble replaced, the bullet holes covered over.

But the reopening Sunday of parts of the iconic Taj Mahal hotel—less than a month after militants stormed the building, spraying staff and guests with gunfire and grenades—comes with more than just a new plaster and paint job. There are new security measures and officials promise a new type of luxury hotel: an “invisible fortress” that can protect guests as well as pamper them.

“We can be hurt, but we will never fall,” a defiant Ratan Tata, chairman of Taj owner Tata Group, said as guests checked into Taj tower for the first time since the Nov. 26 attacks.

The Trident portion of the Oberoi hotel complex also reopened on Sunday, though the main areas of both luxury hotels are expected to stay closed for months. But with the holidays approaching, the two landmarks rushed to woo guests back.

Police manned barricades outside the Taj Sunday night while armed, undercover guards kept watch inside. Everyone walking into the lobby was



Guests tour at the pool side area of the Taj Mahal Palace and Towers after its re-opening in Mumbai, India, Sunday, Dec. 21, 2008.

asked for proof of their hotel reservation. Visitors handed their bags over for inspection and walked through metal detectors as their luggage was scanned through X-ray screening machines.

Among those checking in was a Californian who survived the attacks. During the siege, Deepak Dutta, 50, said he spent 24 hours locked in his room—praying—before being rescued.

Dutta said he checked into the very same room Sunday “to show the terrorists that our spirit cannot be shaken.”

“The Taj is like a second home to me and the staff members are like my family,” he said. “I’m happy that the Taj is back in action.”

The majestic Taj Mahal—an icon of Indian pride and a playground for the global elite for over a century—and the sleek, sea-front Oberoi were among 10 sites targeted in the rampage. At the end of the militants’ 60-hour standoff with police, 164 people and nine gunmen were dead, including dozens of guests and staff members from the two hotels.

At the Oberoi complex’s Trident hotel, a Hindu priest chanted prayers and a Muslim cleric read from the Quran on Sunday.

ASIAN BRIEFS

Scavengers in southern RP find powerful bomb hidden in papaya fruit

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Police defused a powerful bomb hidden inside a papaya fruit that attackers may have intended to detonate Sunday at a Roman Catholic cathedral in a violence-wracked southern Philippine city. About 100 policemen will be deployed this week to bolster the security of Iligan city amid a security scare that has dampened the usually vibrant Christmas holiday season in the industrial hub of more than 300,000 people, Iligan Mayor Lawrence Cruz said. “This is a crisis situation,” Cruz told The Associated Press. “We should be at the height of the Christmas rush now but it feels gloomy.” A bomb fashioned from an 81 mm mortar round and concealed in a papaya fruit was found by scavengers in a vacant lot near a Roman Catholic cathedral in downtown Iligan. Police and army ordnance teams safely defused the bomb, Cruz said. The would-be bombers may have planned to bring the bomb to the cathedral, which was packed with worshippers, but abandoned it at the lot about two blocks away due to heavy police presence in the church area, police Superintendent Celso Regencia said.

North Korean leader's former home open to tourists

HWAJINPO BEACH, South Korea (AP)—This small stone villa perched among fragrant pine trees is about as close as most people can get to North Korea, in more than one way. It is only a few miles away from the border, and it was the childhood home of the boy who grew up to become the leader of the North. Kim Jong Il was 6 years old when his father, North Korea founder Kim Il Sung, took ownership of the house known as “The Castle” near scenic Hwajinpo Beach. When the Korean War ended in 1953, the border between the Koreas was redrawn, and the villa wound up in the South. Today, the villa is a tourist site, and South Korea is planning to expand tourism on its side of the border. The South Korean government has encouraged tour operators to dream up projects such as ecological parks showing off the rare wildlife flourishing in the demilitarized zone, a 2.5-mile-wide buffer between the Koreas. A sprawling \$34 million Korean War museum just north of Kim’s former villa is scheduled to open in March. Elsewhere, tourists can peer at North Korea through telescopes.

2 1/2 tons of marijuana found in Afghan school

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)—Afghan and coalition troops found and destroyed 2.5 tons of marijuana in an abandoned school in southern Afghanistan, while coalition troops killed four militants elsewhere in the south, officials said Sunday. The marijuana, which was stored in 2-feet (0.6-meter) tall stacks, filled several rooms of a school in the Arghistan district of the southern province of Kandahar, a statement from U.S. forces in Afghanistan said. “No students or faculty were at the schoolhouse at the time of the discovery. The school’s furniture had been taken out of the classrooms and left in the courtyard. The amount of rust on the furniture indicated the school may not have been used for its intended purpose for a prolonged period of time,” the statement said. Col. Jerry O’Hara, a U.S. military spokesman, said using a school as a drug warehouse “is an attack on the future of all Afghanistan.”

China readies for crackdown on organized crime

BEIJING (AP)—China plans to set up a special unit to crack down on organized crime, which is on the increase as the country’s economy slows, state media said Monday.

The Ministry of Public Security is creating a new division that will focus on gang-related crimes such as organized prostitution, gambling, drug production and trafficking, the official China Daily quoted a senior ministry official as saying.

“In the foreseeable future, gangs will remain active as the country undergoes

dramatic social and economic change,” said the official, who declined to be named for security reasons. “Gang-related crimes have become a threat to our social stability and the economy.”

Security officials will also keep a close eye on possible crimes stemming from unemployment amid the ongoing financial downturn, the report said.

Liang Huaren, a law professor at the China University of Political Science and Law, was quoted as saying that the large numbers of laid-off migrant workers as well as the widening gap

between rich and poor has helped fuel an increase in gang-related crimes.

China’s court system reported that 337 gang crimes were prosecuted in 2007, marking a 161 percent increase from the previous year.

The ministry official said that gangs are expanding their reach into more areas and industries, such as construction, transportation and mining.

He said the Public Security Ministry will also focus on rooting out corrupt government officials who shelter gangsters.

Japan in ‘65 sought US nuclear shield versus China

TOKYO (AP)—Japan’s longest-serving prime minister—a Nobel Peace laureate—asked the U.S. in 1965 to deploy nuclear weapons against China if war broke out between the Asian rivals, according to newly declassified government files obtained by Kyodo news agency.

During his first trip to Washington as the Japanese leader, Eisaku Sato told then-U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara that American military forces could launch a nuclear attack on China by sea if needed, Kyodo said Monday.

Under its post-World War II constitution, Japan renounces war as a sovereign right and prohibits the use of force in international conflicts.

But the new details of Sato’s discussions with the U.S. reveal a more complicated picture behind his strong public stance against nuclear weapons as well as his intense distrust of China.

His comments came a day after his talks with President Lyndon Johnson on Jan. 12, 1965, during which he sought to reconfirm a U.S. promise to defend Japan under the U.S.-Japan security treaty, according to Kyodo. The documents show that Johnson assured the Japanese leader of Washington’s commitment to the pact.



China triggered Japanese and U.S. concerns about the country’s emergence as a nuclear power after Beijing tested its first atomic bomb on Oct. 16, 1964.

Sato, in office from 1964 to 1972, also told McNamara that although Japan was technically capable of building atomic weapons, it had no intention of doing so, according to documents that were routinely declassified by Japan’s foreign ministry after 30 years and obtained by Kyodo.

China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not immediately respond to a request Sunday for comment.

Alleged arms smuggler Bout testifies in Thailand

BANGKOK, Thailand (AP)—Alleged arms smuggler Viktor Bout took the stand Monday for the first time to fight his extradition to the United States and deny charges that he conspired to arm Colombian rebels.

The United States is seeking the extradition of Bout, who was arrested in the Thai capital in a sting operation in which undercover U.S. agents posed as Latin American rebels from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

“I didn’t do anything wrong in Thailand. I have never been to Colombia or the United States,” Bout, wearing an orange prison jumpsuit, told the court at the start of his testimony.

Dubbed the “Merchant of Death,” the 41-year-old Russian has since been indicted in the U.S. on four terrorism-related charges. He was arrested in March and has remained behind bars in Bangkok ever since. Bout, who denies any involvement in illicit activities, was pur-

portedly the model for the arms dealer portrayed by Nicolas Cage in the 2005 movie “Lord of War.”

According to reports by U.N. agencies and several Western governments, Bout has delivered arms to dictators and warlords in Africa and Afghanistan, allegedly breaking several U.N. arms embargoes in the process.

His extradition hearing started in June but has been repeatedly delayed, with a revolving door of defense attorneys.

World

Top US general in Iraq prepares for troop decision

BASRA, Iraq (AP)—The top U.S. general in Iraq said he will make a decision about the future role of American troops in early spring, to allow enough time to address any violence

that may arise from January's provincial elections.

Army Gen. Ray Odierno told The Associated Press that the two-month period after the election will allow U.S. troops and

Iraqi security forces to ensure those legitimately elected can take office. He also said U.S. troops will move into southern Iraq early next year to replace departing British forces.



AP
U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates shakes hands with Gen. Ray Odierno, left, commander of multinational forces Iraq following a town hall meeting with troops Saturday, Dec. 13, 2008, in Balad, Iraq.

Israeli official warns of longer Gaza rocket range

JERUSALEM (AP)—Israel's top security official warned Sunday that Gaza militants can hit more Israeli cities with longer-range rockets, on a day when rockets exploded in border towns and a coastal city after an Israel-Hamas truce expired.

Only one Israeli was lightly wounded in the barrage of 19 rockets and three mortars by nightfall. But after a weekend of heavy rocket attacks—and two Israeli airstrikes in response—Israel's government threatened to strike back hard. One rocket exploded in Ashkelon, a city of about 120,000 on the Mediterranean coast 10 miles (16 kilometers) north of Gaza. In the past, Israel has responded harshly to attacks on Ashkelon.

The government has been

under heavy pressure to react to the rocket fire, but the military has so far been wary of doing so for fear of casualties. In the past, large operations have not succeeded in stopping the rockets.

A truce between Israel and Hamas expired on Friday after six months. The truce had frayed since early November, and rocket fire at Israeli towns has been increasing steadily in recent days.

"The scenarios are clear, the plans are clear, the determination is clear, and so are the ramifications of each of the steps," Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said at his Cabinet's weekly meeting. "A responsible government is not happy to go to war, but does not evade it."

The government has been

Iran shuts office of Nobel winner's rights group

TEHRAN, Iran (AP)—Iranian authorities shut down the office of a human rights group led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi on Sunday as the group was preparing to honor a political activist who spent 17 years in prison in the Islamic republic.

Iranian authorities banned Ebadi's Center for Protecting Human Rights last year, but it had continued to operate from an office in the north of the capital, Tehran.

Ebadi said police in uniform and plainclothes security officials raided and sealed the building where her group was working without presenting a warrant. No arrests were reported.

The semiofficial Mehr news

agency reported that judiciary officials ordered the center's closure because it did not have the required legal permits. A judiciary statement said the human rights center had issued statements that created an atmosphere "of media publicity against the establishment in recent years," Mehr reported.

Ebadi said her group would continue its work despite the raid. "Shutting down our offices won't make us stop our human rights activities. We will meet again somewhere else and will continue to support the rights of activists and political prisoners," she told The Associated Press.

Ebadi said recent reports by her group accusing the Iranian government of human rights

"So we have to make sure in the election those who didn't win understand that, and we will be able to seat the new government properly," Odierno, the overall commander of U.S. and allied forces in Iraq, told AP late Saturday. "And once we get to that point, it's now time for us to take a look at what is right for the future."

Violence is dropping sharply throughout the country—an Iraqi military official said Sunday that murder rates have returned to pre-war levels.

Military officials say Odierno has already outlined for Pentagon leaders a withdrawal plan that would pull thousands of troops out of Iraq early next year but move more cautiously than the 16-month timetable pledged by President-elect Barack Obama.

"I expect we will start to thin our forces in '09. It's the right time to do that," he said. "We will do it in a deliberate, careful way to make sure we have enough combat power to support the Iraqis in case there is the unexpected, a resurgence of an extremist group of some sort that tries to have an effect of the stability inside Iraq."

Odierno said he has not talked with anyone on Obama's transition team.

"I have a mission I currently have with the current commander-in-chief, and I am working toward that mission," Odierno said. "When our new commander-in-chief comes in and tells us what he would like us to do, then I will migrate my mission and my plan to what he wants to do. Until then there is not much to talk about."

Russia licenses faith healers



AP
Mikhail Fadkin, left, treats a boy named Sasha who declined to give his last name, in the village of Malakhovka, 20 km (about 13 miles) southeast of Moscow on Thursday, Dec. 11, 2008.

MOSCOW (AP)—Mikhail Fadkin claims he can cure a long list of disorders—pancreatitis, bronchitis, digestive problems, even infertility—by using his hands to manipulate what he describes as a person's "bio-energy field."

Many laugh at such ideas and might call him a quack. But the 63-year-old healer, who practices out of an office in a Moscow suburb, holds a license from the Russian government.

For the past two years, the Federal Health Service has been issuing licenses to practitioners of what it calls "traditional medicine," meaning anything from the use of herbal treatments to the manipulation of "auras." His claims buttressed by officialdom, Fadkin charges patients 3,500 rubles (\$150) per session.

And he says business is very good.

"Every day I learn some-

WORLD BRIEFS

Russia tariff protest widens into broad discontent

VLADIVOSTOK, Russia (AP)—Riot police clubbed, kicked and detained dozens in the Pacific port of Vladivostok on Sunday in a harsh crackdown on a protest that was one of dozens across Russia by people outraged over an increase in car import tariffs. With unemployment spiking, prices rising and the ruble sliding, the protests over a seemingly mundane tariff appear to be broadening into a wide expression of public discontent—and beginning to present a genuine challenge to the Kremlin.

"The Russian people have started to open their eyes to what's happening in this country," said Andrei Ivanov, a 30-year-old manager who joined about 200 people at a rally in Moscow. "The current regime is not acting on behalf of the welfare of the people, but against the welfare of the people."

Bosnia lacks cash to purge killer mines

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP)—Muriz Jukic keeps reliving the day last winter when his tractor hit a land mine, unleashing shrapnel that tore one of his eyes from its socket and left him stumbling and screaming. "I dream about that flash and I wake up soaked in sweat," says Jukic, 43, who was injured while gather-

ing firewood near his home in the northeastern Bosnia village of Vitinica. Thirteen years after Bosnia's 1992-95 war ended, mines are still claiming scores of victims. A closer look by The Associated Press shows the problem is not that officials don't know where most of the explosives are buried. It's that they just can't seem to scrape together enough cash to get them out of the ground.

Repair crews reach damaged cables in Mediterranean

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP)—A robotic submarine searched beneath the Mediterranean on Sunday for damaged communications cables, two days after Web and telephone access was knocked out for much of the Middle East. Telecommunication providers from Cairo to Dubai continued Sunday to scramble to reroute voice and data traffic through potentially costly detours in Asia and North America after the lines running under the Mediterranean Sea were damaged Friday. Internet access was largely knocked out for two days in at least six countries that were affected—Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan and Yemen. It is the second time this year that trans-Mediterranean cables to Europe have been severed. The earlier cut, in late January, was apparently caused by a ship's anchor.

Overdrive

The game-changing Ford Fusion Hybrid

By DAN NEIL
LOS ANGELES TIMES

As we know from the literary works of Cormac McCarthy, despair can be kind of gratifying. And yet, as much as I hate to disturb our national mood of decline, I have some good news regarding the auto industry. You may return to your comfort drinking presently. The 2010 Ford Fusion Hybrid, and its twin, the Mercury Milan Hybrid, are mid-to-full-size sedans that seat five in surprising comfort and offer a full-size trunk measuring around 12 cubic feet. They measure 190.6 inches and weigh a goodly 3,720 pounds. The gas-electric output is 191 horsepower and 0-60 mph acceleration is under 9 seconds.

The retail price of a nicely equipped Fusion Hybrid—with blandishments such as rearview camera, blind-spot alert and 17-inch alloy wheels—is \$27,270. With the applicable federal tax credit, the car should cost consumers about \$25,000, I esti-



The 2010 Ford Fusion Hybrid delivered 52 miles per gallon in mixed-city highway driving.

mate (final numbers have not been announced).

On a test drive of a Fusion Hybrid recently in traffic, I managed, without much trouble, to get 52 miles per gallon in mixed city-highway driving.

Wait, so, has somebody invented the car of the future and didn't tell us?

And yet, here we are, with a car that seemed purely theoretical—a desirable, affordable, no-compromise sedan that gets

40-plus mpg—about to show up at Ford dealerships in the first quarter of 2009.

Now what? Now people have to buy them.

For all the game-changing glow around the Ford Fusion Hybrid, it's actually a fairly conservative and programmatic approach to gas-electric propulsion. The system is an evolution of the hybrid system in the Ford Escape. The battery is nickel-metal hydride, not lithium (lithium chem-

istry batteries are lighter and more energy-dense, but they are also expensive and finicky, which is to say, flammable).

The nickel battery will please many in the green-car movement who claim that the search for the perfect battery—a la the Chevy Volt—has only delayed development of the good. (Edmund Burke said the worst thing a man can do is do nothing because he can do only a little.)

The Sanyo-supplied battery

pack—270 volts and 1.4 kWh, if that helps—is 30 percent smaller in volume and 23 percent lighter than the one in the Escape. The smaller battery is easier to cool, requiring only cabin air ducted from underneath the back seat.

The battery supplies enough glowing ponies to propel the car to speeds up to 47 mph on all-electric power. This is key to the car's in-city mileage. On my 50-mile drive, I was able to feather-foot the throttle enough to accelerate to commuting speeds without waking the gas engine. When I needed to accelerate faster, I could dip in to the engine horsepower briefly to overcome inertia, then maintain momentum with the electric motor. At one stage I was getting 63 mpg.

To make a full-size car go fast on electric power alone, you need a boatload of voltage. But high-voltage systems involve increased impedance and heat losses, which is wasted energy. To unknot this problem, the Fusion

uses a variable-voltage converter that temporarily steps up system voltage during peak demand or hard braking, when the battery is forcefully recharged.

This is actually one of two high-tech converters on board: The second system provides juice to an array of high-voltage systems such as steering, air-conditioning and brakes.

There's a lot of other arcane technology that goes into a car, like reams of software code that allows all the various components to talk sweetly to one another. But perhaps the most valuable bit of software is the wetware, the stuff between the driver's ears. To that end, the Fusion Hybrid uses a delightful, LCD instrument cluster with modules that coach drivers on how to save fuel. In one panel, the more lightly you drive, the more leaves that grow on a set of animated vines. You can go from lead-footed, gas-bingeing knucklehead (like me) to abstemious hyper-miler in a matter of minutes. Brilliant.

2009 ACURA TL SH-AWD

A daring departure from bland Japanese designs

By WARREN BROWN
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON—I want design to move me, to play with my emotions in the manner of music, dance, sculpture or a painting. I want it to make me feel something—love, lust, anger, joy or any combination thereof. I want it to become a part of my history, an evocative force, something that rekindles memories, be they good or bad.

American and European automotive design have long affected me in those ways. I became wistful at the thought of the 1957 Chevrolet BelAir, a beautifully tail-finned thing that was my first automotive love. I collapse in laughter if I think too long about the incredible ugliness of the 2001 Pontiac Aztek crossover utility vehicle. And I've yet to share company with a car from Mercedes-Benz, including the somewhat amorphous Mercedes-Benz 190 sedan, that didn't make me feel good.

Japanese automotive design, by comparison, has often left me numb. It is either slavishly imitative of something European or it is desperately neutral, trying neither to please nor to offend, skirting a boundary between boredom and anonymity. The 1990s versions of the Toyota Camry come to mind.

But I've just spent a week in a Japanese automobile that shatters that perception. It is the 2009 Acura TL SH-AWD (Super Handling-All-Wheel Drive) sedan. It is forceful, edgy, dar-

ing in its embrace of angularity front and rear. I'm sure that it will attract detractors. That's okay. It also will have its share of loyalists. It's that kind of car. It makes a statement, which is what a well-designed automobile should do.

There is a new book out, "Outliers," by former Washington Post colleague Malcolm Gladwell. Outlier is a scientific term used to describe phenomena existing outside normal, expected experience. Think of a cold Arizona day in August. Or, in the subject context of this column, think of an arresting Japanese automobile design, one that refuses to let go of your psyche.

The styling of the new Acura TL SH-AWD is like that—a magnet for unsolicited insult

and praise.

"What did they do to that car?" detractors asked.

"They," in this case, would be Honda, maker of all things Acura. And what "they" did this time around was give the TL a definitive, sporting personality—a persona that is a distinct TL persona in the way that the BMW 3-Series identity fits the BMW 3-Series and nothing else.

For Acura, that is a design breakthrough. We no longer have a TL that is trying to figure out if it's little more than a Honda Accord with a slightly more sporting chassis or something less than a BMW-3 Series or Mercedes-Benz C-Class with Acura badges. In its current iteration—the fourth generation of the car—the Acura



The 2009 Acura TL SH-AWD sedan is forceful, edgy, daring in its embrace of angularity front and rear. It will attract detractors—that's okay. It also will have its share of loyalists.

TL finally makes its own statement. And it does so consistently, with its exterior angularity reflected and picked up in interior design in the bend of aluminum inserts in the door and instrument panels.

It is what those of us who have been pushing for a bolder TL have wanted all along. And

it helps, of course, that Honda did not stop at styling in the remake of this one. The new TL offers more room for legs and heads than its predecessor. It is discernibly more comfortable. And, certainly in the top-line SH-AWD version, it deserves a nod for offering a more powerful yet relatively economical V-6 engine.

NUTS & BOLTS

By WARREN BROWN
THE WASHINGTON POST

COMPLAINTS

Both Ria Manglapus, my associate for vehicle evaluations, and my wife, Mary Anne, complained about abrupt transmission shifts in the TL SH-AWD. I did not experience the same discomfort. I'll leave it at that.

RIDE, ACCELERATION AND HANDLING

The ride is harder than many people might expect, especially when the TL SH-AWD is shod with low-aspect-ratio "summer" performance tires. The ride is more accommodating with all-season, mud-plus-snow radials. Handling is superior on

summer performance rubber. It is very good on mud-plus-snow radials. Acceleration is excellent.

HEAD-TURNING QUOTIENT

Some people love it. Others hate it. No one can ignore it.

BODY STYLE/LAYOUT

The Acura TL is a front-engine, entry-level luxury, mid-size sport sedan available with front-wheel drive or all-wheel drive. It is offered in four basic trim packages — base, base with tech package, SH-AWD and SH-AWD with tech package.

ENGINE/TRANSMISSION

The 2009 Acura TL SH-AWD comes with a 3.7-liter, 24-valve V-6 that develops 305 horse-

power at 6,300 revolutions per minute and 273 foot-pounds of torque at 5,000 revolutions per minute. The engine uses electronic valve lift and timing to improve fuel efficiency. It is linked to a five-speed transmission that can be shifted automatically or manually.

CAPACITIES

There are seats for five people. Maximum cargo capacity is 13 cubic feet. The fuel tank holds 18.5 gallons of required premium unleaded gasoline.

MILEAGE

Real-world highway mileage was right at 25 miles per gallon. But spending time in Washington and Baltimore traffic jams reduced city mileage to 15 miles per gallon.

SAFETY

Standard equipment includes four-wheel disc brakes with antilock protection; side and head air bags; and electronic stability and traction control.

PRICE

The base price on the 2009 Acura TL SH-AWD sedan is \$42,235. Dealer's invoice price on that model is \$38,812. Price as tested is \$42,995, including a \$760 destination charge. Dealer's price as tested is \$39,572. Prices are sourced from Honda/Acura, Edmunds.com and Cars.com, an affiliate of The Washington Post.

PURSE-STRINGS NOTE

A very nice package. Compare with Audi A4, Infiniti G35 and M35, VW CC, BMW 3 Series.

Life & Style

NY exhibit unveils women's lives in ancient Greece



This undated photo provided by the Onassis Cultural Center shows a 470-450 B.C. shallow clay cup depicting a young woman standing before an altar holding wheat evoking the cult worship of the fertility goddess Demeter.

AP

A woman's place has never been just in the home—not even in ancient Greece.

The proof is in an exhibit titled "Worshiping Women: Ritual and Reality in Classical Athens"—a collection of artifacts that correct the cliched idea of Athenian women as passive, homebound nurturers of men and children.

In the display covering Greek life, art and religion, women play important, vibrant roles, as do their goddesses—from lover to priestess to political peacemaker to protagonist of public festivals.

"Today's woman has more in common with the woman of ancient Athens than one imagines," said curator Stella Chryssoulaki. She pointed to a vase showing a group of women who escaped city life, getting together in the countryside for a three-day festival honoring their beloved god Dionysius. They talked and shared lots of wine, leaving their husbands behind.

Contrary to the popular perception of the Athenian female rituals as wild orgies, "there was no sex."

It was a religious rite, but also "a way to get out of the house and talk and exchange feelings," Chryssoulaki said. "It was kind of like group therapy—and then they went home relaxed and ready for the stresses of daily life."

Resentful husbands gave these gatherings a bad name, but actually Dionysius "was a gentle god, both somewhat masculine and feminine," she said.

The 155 artifacts illuminated in cases and on pedestals in the Manhattan exhibit are mostly from Greece, with contributions from the Vatican, Russia's Hermitage Museum, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and other top art sources in Italy and Germany.

Just steps from Fifth Avenue, "Worshiping Women" is located in the Onassis Cultural Center in the basement of a modern Manhattan skyscraper, Olympic Tower, that on a higher floor houses the American offices of the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation. It's named after the son of the late Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis, who was married to Jacqueline Kennedy; his son and heir, Alexander, had died young in a plane crash.

The center's mission is to promote Hellenic culture, and it sponsors exhibitions in the underground

gallery such as "Worshiping Women," which opened Dec. 10 and runs through May 9. The show was conceived by Nikolaos Kaltsas, director of the National Archaeological Museum of Greece in Athens, and Alan Shapiro, professor of archaeology at Johns Hopkins University.

While women in Athens couldn't vote and were told whom to marry, the exhibit is packed with objects that attest to their vital roles in everything from food and sex to birth and death.

Women were part of both politics and religion, which in those days overlapped.

A large earthen vessel depicts a scene from Homer's "Iliad" in which a Trojan priestess receives Greek warriors who had come to recover Helen from Troy. "The priestess secures the peace," said the curator.

A key depicted on another vase was kept only by a woman who opened the door to the treasures in the temple of the priestesses.

A small bronze statuette of Athena shows her as armed and dangerous, leading Athens' warriors against Troy. And on a black vase, she's a thinker, etching words onto the waxy surface of a "laptop" notebook with a sharp wooden stick that served as a writing tool.

A tiny vase to be filled with wine for ritual tastings could be carried by a girl.

"Women in Athens, were they invisible?" asked Chryssoulaki. "No!"

Greek myths, with all their blood and guts, are not for the faint of heart—and neither are parts of this exhibit.

Athena, the goddess of wisdom, came from the brain of her father, Zeus. And Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, was born when Uranus was castrated by his son, who pitched his severed genitals into the sea. From the turbulence—"aphros" means sea foam in Greek—arose the erotic Aphrodite. She became both the lover and surrogate mother of the god Adonis, whom she shared with the goddess Persephone.

And we thought modern life was complicated.

But the mythical births of Athena and Aphrodite have real meaning to the



In this undated photo provided by the Onassis Cultural Center shows a Greek drinking cup from around 440 B.C. that graphically describes the amorous pursuit of Athena by the Olympian god of fire, Hephaestus.



This undated photo provided by the Onassis Cultural Center shows a 2nd century A.D. marble statuette of Athena, sometimes worshipped as a goddess of war, wearing a breastplate made up of coiled snakes.

AP

modern mind: as a battle of emotion vs. intellect. "Myths were a way to see human life," concluded Chryssoulaki.

In the exhibit, life is also reflected in sculptures and tiny objects like a ritual bowl that a woman who baked bread for a living donated to a temple—representing about 10 percent of her meager income. Her name is noted on the bowl.

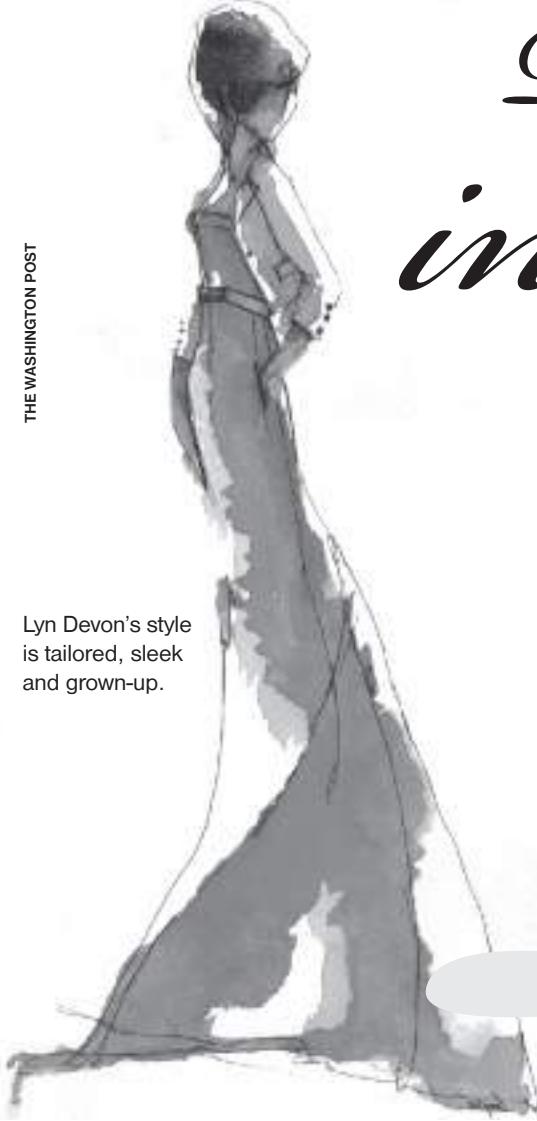
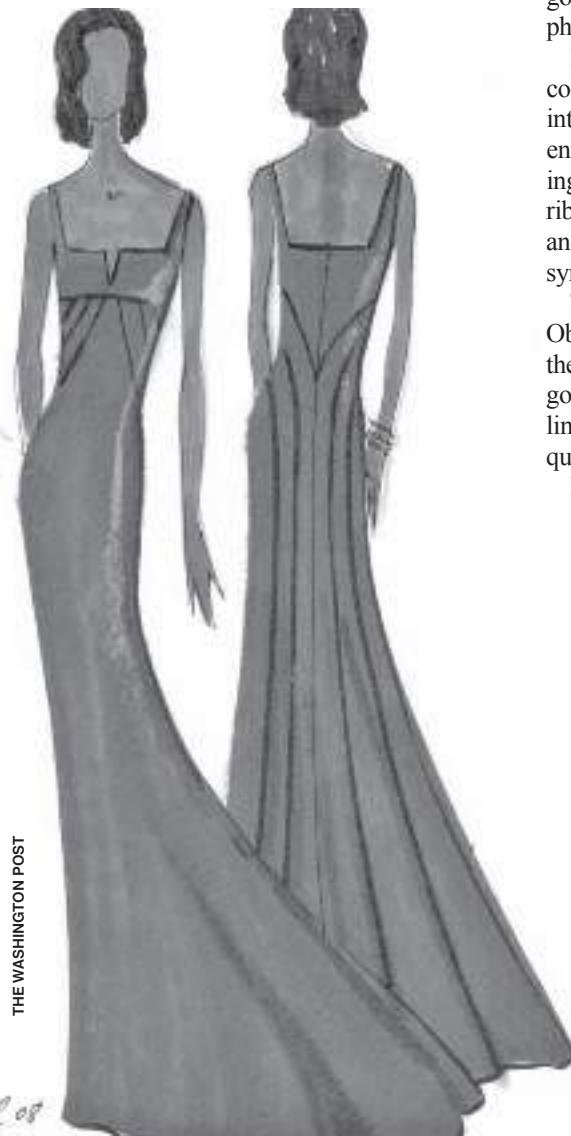
"You see, even poor, ordinary women left a mark, they played a role—and they were part of the life of the gods," said Chryssoulaki. (AP)

Designers' drafts on the inaugural gown

By ROBIN GIVHAN

(C) 2008, THE WASHINGTON POST

Lyn Devon's style is tailored, sleek and grown-up.

Kevan Hall's inaugural dress is ruby-red silk and wool radzimir, sleeveless and with bias insets and a train.

Rachel Roy offers an asymmetrical inaugural gown of ivory silk crepe. She included an auburn silk gazar dress festooned with feathers for Malia and a royal blue silk jacquard dress with a tulle petticoat for Sasha.

THE WASHINGTON POST



Tracy Reese created a side-wrapped gown in silk-wool with a deep, V-shaped neckline.

THE WASHINGTON POST

The inaugural dress captures the popular imagination. And so we asked a few designers to sketch their dream inaugural gown. We avoided the Seventh Avenue stalwarts and big guns. No Oscar, Donna, Ralph or Calvin. Instead, we took a cue from the future first lady, who has a taste for lesser-known designers, iconoclasts and upstarts. She has worn ensembles by Narciso Rodriguez, Maria Cornejo, Thakoon Panichgul and Isabel Toledo. Phillip Lim—who debuted his line in 2005 and can design a splendid party dress for less than \$1,000—opted out of our fantasy fashion show because he submitted sketches in the official gown sweepstakes.

So we turned to the next generation of American designers and asked them to play make-believe. In honor of an administration that has embraced "change" as its mantra, we looked to fashion's future, to find out how the post-baby boomer generations see the next first lady and how they see themselves.

Doo-Ri Chung, honored in 2006 as best new womenswear designer by the Council of Fashion Designers of America, envisions a first lady as a regal goddess wearing a bold purple silk gown that emphasizes the designer's signature Grecian draping.

Peter Som, who briefly designed the Bill Blass collection, incorporates grandeur and propriety into his work without sacrificing youthfulness. He envisions the first lady in a white gown of flowing silk marocain—a dress fabric with a slightly ribbed effect. The gown has a modest fishtail hem and a built-in bustier. Som chose white, he said, to symbolize hope.

Tracy Reese, one of dozens of Seventh Avenue Obama supporters who created merchandise for the campaign's Web site, created a side-wrapped gown in silk-wool with a deep, V-shaped neckline. She described the color of the dress as not quite purple and not exactly blue, but "pansy."

Derek Lam has had practice with inaugural en-

sembles. He created the swearing-in ensemble young Barbara Bush wore to her father's 2005 inauguration. He envisions Michelle Obama in separates—a concept that American designers practically invented. He pairs a pale green radzimir silk blouse with a pumice silk faille skirt with a slight train.

When Rachel Roy presented her spring 2009 collection in September, she included an ivory sheath embroidered with "Vivre le change vous vouloir"—Be the change you want—in black script. The Gandhi quote was a favorite of the then-Democratic nominee. She offers an asymmetrical inaugural gown of ivory silk crepe. She included an auburn silk gazar dress festooned with feathers for Malia and a royal blue silk jacquard dress with a tulle petticoat for Sasha.

Kevan Hall, the only Los Angeles-based designer in this group of New Yorkers, is known for his red-carpet gowns for actresses such as Vanessa Williams. His inaugural dress is ruby-red silk and wool radzimir, sleeveless and with bias insets and a train.

Of all the designers we solicited, Lyn Devon has the lowest profile. She quietly launched her collection in 2005 after graduating from Brown University, interning at Zac Posen and designing womenswear at Ralph Lauren. Her style is tailored, sleek and grown-up. She sees Michelle Obama in a strapless coral peau de soie gown with a velvet sash and a turquoise jewel closure. She pairs the dress with a shrunken satin jacket.

The Marchesa collection, founded by Georgina Chapman and Keren Craig, came to prominence thanks to a long list of actresses who have worn the exuberantly feminine gowns on the awards circuit. For the inauguration, Marchesa suggests an ivory one-shoulder caftan-style dress with metallic gold embroidery. It is reminiscent of the seafoam green Valentino gown Jennifer Lopez wore to the 2003 Oscars. Valentino had made a version of the dress for Jackie Kennedy in 1967.



Derek Lam envisions Michelle Obama in separates—a concept that American designers practically invented.



Peter Som incorporates grandeur and propriety into his work without sacrificing youthfulness.



Doo-Ri Chung envisions a first lady as a regal goddess wearing a bold purple silk gown that emphasizes the designer's signature Grecian draping.

The Washington Post

Tracy Reese created a side-wrapped gown in silk-wool with a deep, V-shaped neckline.

THE WASHINGTON POST

Carrey's 'Yes Man' earns aye vote with \$18M debut

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Movie audiences greeted Jim Carrey and Will Smith with a lukewarm "yes" as snowstorms undermined weekend debuts from both stars.

Carrey's comedy "Yes Man" opened at No. 1 with \$18.2 million in ticket sales, while Smith's drama "Seven Pounds" came in second with \$16 million, according to studio estimates Sunday.

Debuting at No. 3 with \$10.5 million was Matthew Broderick's animated family flick "The Tale of Despereaux." The new movies arrived in theaters Friday just as storms pounded the Northeast. "Those markets back east just got hammered," said Chris Aronson, distribution executive for 20th Century Fox, whose sci-fi saga "The Day the Earth Stood Still" slipped from No. 1 to No. 4 with \$10.2 million. The movie starring Keanu Reeves raised its 10-day

total to \$48.6 million.

"Yes Man," released by Warner Bros., stars Carrey as a loser who turns his life around by subscribing to a philosophy of saying "yes" to everything. Sony's "Seven Pounds" casts Smith as a mysterious IRS agent doing good deeds for strangers, and Universal's "Tale of Despereaux" features Broderick as the mouthpiece for a tiny mouse on a heroic mission.

In limited release, Mickey Rourke's acclaimed drama "The Wrestler" had a heavyweight debut, taking in \$209,474 in just four theaters for a whopping average of \$52,369.

By comparison, "Yes Man" played in 3,434 theaters and averaged \$5,288 per theater, while "Seven Pounds" opened in 2,758 and averaged \$5,801 per theater.

The No. 3 film "The Tale of Des-

pereaux" played in 3,104 theaters and grabbed \$3,385 per venue.

The film released by Fox Searchlight stars Rourke as a former wrestling champion struggling for one last taste of past glory. The comeback theme of "The Wrestler" parallels Rourke's real life, with the actor in the running for an Academy Award nomination after his bad boy behavior virtually ruined his career in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

While winter came in with a bang, Hollywood's solid year was going out with a whimper. The overall box office plunged for the second straight weekend as this season's pre-holiday offerings continued to lag far behind the strong finish provided by such 2007 hits as Smith's "I Am Legend" and "Alvin and the Chipmunks."

The top 12 movies took in

1. "Yes Man," \$18.2 million.
2. "Seven Pounds," \$16 million.
3. "The Tale of Despereaux," \$10.5 million.
4. "The Day the Earth Stood Still," \$10.2 million.
5. "Four Christmases," \$7.7 million.
6. "Twilight," \$5.2 million.
7. "Bolt," \$4.3 million.
8. "Slumdog Millionaire," \$3.2 million.
9. "Australia," \$2.3 million.
10. "Quantum of Solace," \$2.2 million.



AP

In this image released by Warner Bros. Pictures, actors, from left, Bradley Cooper, Jim Carrey, and Danny Masterson are shown in a scene from, "Yes Man."

\$82.8 million, down 44 percent from the same weekend last year, when "National Treasure: Book of Secrets" led with \$44.8 million.

The last two ho-hum weekends have hindered Hollywood's shot at breaking the domestic revenue record of \$9.7 billion set last year. Revenues through Sunday were at \$9.24

billion, virtually even with 2007 through the same date, according to box-office tracker Media By Numbers. Given the sour economy, studio executives generally are satisfied with this year's results. Hollywood tends to ride out recessions with solid business, since movies are relatively inexpensive compared to entertainment options such as

concerts or sports events.

"The movie business may be recession-proof, but this weekend, it's not weather-proof," said Paul Dergarabedian, president of Media By Numbers.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Media By Numbers LLC. Final figures will be released Monday.

BEST SELLERS

(c) 2008 Los Angeles Times

Nonfiction

Outliers, by Malcolm Gladwell (Little, Brown: \$27.99) An exploration of high-achievers.

Holidays on Ice, by David Sedaris (Little, Brown: \$16.99) Comical tales of holiday traditions.

Dewey, by Vicki Myron with Bret Witter (Grand Central: \$19.99) A cat checks out an Iowa library.

The Last Lecture, by Randy Pausch with Jeffrey Zaslow (Hyperion: \$21.95) A professor's terminal cancer inspires a call to seize life's moments.

Hot, Flat, and Crowded, by Thomas L. Friedman (Farrar, Straus & Giroux: \$27.95) Solving overpopulation and the global-warming crisis.

Why We Suck, by Denis Leary (Viking: \$26.95) The comedian's biting commentary on the state of the world.

The 4-Hour Workweek, by Timothy Ferriss (Crown: \$19.95) A blueprint for living life on your own terms.

American Lion, by Jon Meacham (Random House: \$30) Andrew Jackson's path to the White House.

The Purpose of Christmas, by Rick Warren (Howard Books: \$17.99) A call to honor the significance and promise of the holiday.

Panic, by Michael Lewis (W.W. Norton: \$27.85) A guide through five of the most costly upheavals in financial history.

Fiction

The Private Patient, by P.D. James (Knopf: \$25.95) A murder investigation focuses on the staff from a plastic-surgery clinic.

Scarpetta, by Patricia Cornwell (Putnam: \$27.95) Forensic pathologist Kay Scarpetta examines a psychiatric patient.

The Tales of Beedle the Bard, by J.K. Rowling (Children's High Level Group: \$12.99) A collection of five fairy tales inspired by Harry Potter.

Breaking Dawn, by Stephenie Meyer (Little, Brown: \$22.99) The final book in the Twilight saga finds Bella choosing immortality.

The Story of Edgar Sawtelle, by David Wroblewski (Ecco: \$25.95) A mute dog breeder is banished by his uncle a la Hamlet.

Eclipse, by Stephenie Meyer (Little, Brown: \$19.99) Bella must choose between her lover and a friend, between life and death.

A Mercy, by Toni Morrison (Knopf: \$23.95) A slave girl is sold by her mother in late 1600s America to give her a better life.

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society, by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows (Dial Press: \$22) A writer corresponds with islanders after German occupation.

The Hour I First Believed, by Wally Lamb (Harper: \$29.95) A couple seek to reconstruct their lives after a tragic school shooting in Colorado.

Arctic Drift, by Clive Cussler and Dirk Cussler (Putnam: \$27.95) The U.S. and Canada are on the brink of war in this third joint Dirk Pitt novel.

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Seven Pounds

Friday 4:10 7:10 9:40
Saturday 1:15 4:10 7:10 9:40
Sunday 1:15 4:10 7:10
Mon and Tue 4:10 7:10
Wed 1:15 4:10 7:10

Will Smith, Rosario Dawson

Drama, Romance • Rated PG 13

Synopsis

Ben Thomas, an IRS agent with a fateful secret, embarks on an extraordinary journey of redemption by forever changing the lives of seven strangers.



The Tale of Despereaux

Friday 4:00 7:00 9:45
Saturday 1:00 4:00 7:00 9:45
Sunday 1:00 4:00 7:00
Mon and Tue 4:00 7:00
Wed 1:00 4:00 7:00

Sigourney Weaver, Dustin Hoffman

Animated, Children • Rated G

Synopsis

In the faraway kingdom of Dor, four unlikely heroes emerge: Despereaux, a brave mouse banished to the dungeon for speaking with a human; Roscuro, a good-hearted rat who loves light and soup, but is exiled to darkness; Pea, a Princess in a gloomy castle who is prisoner to her father's grief; and Mig, a servant girl who longs to be a Princess, but is forced to serve the jailer.



Yes Man

Friday 4:20 7:05 9:35
Saturday 1:05 4:20 7:05 9:35
Sunday 1:05 4:20 7:05
Mon and Tue 4:20 7:05
Wed 1:05 4:20 7:05

Jim Carrey, Bradley Cooper

Comedy • Rated PG 13

Synopsis

Carl Allen's life is going nowhere--the operative word being "no"--until he signs up for a self-help program based on one simple covenant: say yes to everything--and anything. Unleashing the power of "YES" begins to transform Carl's life in amazing unexpected ways, getting him promoted at work and opening the door to a new romance.



The Day The Earth Stood Still

Friday 4:05 7:25 10:00
Saturday 1:20 4:05 7:25 10:00
Sunday 1:20 4:05 7:25
Mon and Tue 4:05 7:25
Wed 1:20 4:05 7:25

Keanu Reeves, Jennifer Connelly

Sci-Fi • Rated PG 13

Transporter 3

Friday 4:30 7:15 9:55
Saturday 1:25 4:30 7:15 9:55
Sunday 1:25 4:30 7:15
Mon and Tue 4:30 7:15
Wed 1:25 4:30 7:15

Jason Statham, Robert Berleand

Action, Crime, Sequel • Rated PG 13



Twilight

Friday 4:25 7:20 9:50
Saturday 1:30 4:25 7:20 9:50
Sunday 1:30 4:25 7:20
Mon and Tue 4:25 7:20
Wed 1:30 4:25 7:20

Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson

Drama, Thriller • Rated PG 13

Bolt

Friday 4:15 7:30 9:30
Saturday 1:10 4:15 7:30 9:30
Sunday 1:10 4:15 7:30
Mon and Tue 4:15 7:30
Wed 1:10 4:15 7:30

John Travolta, Miley Cyrus

Action, Animated • Rated PG

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A brighter future for Brian Goodman

By SUSAN KING
(C) 2008, LOS ANGELES TIMES

HOLLYWOOD—The bullet that's lodged in Brian Goodman's brain serves as a constant reminder.

"One thing you can't lose sight of is where I could be, where I am supposed to be and where I have been," he says in his strong south Boston accent.

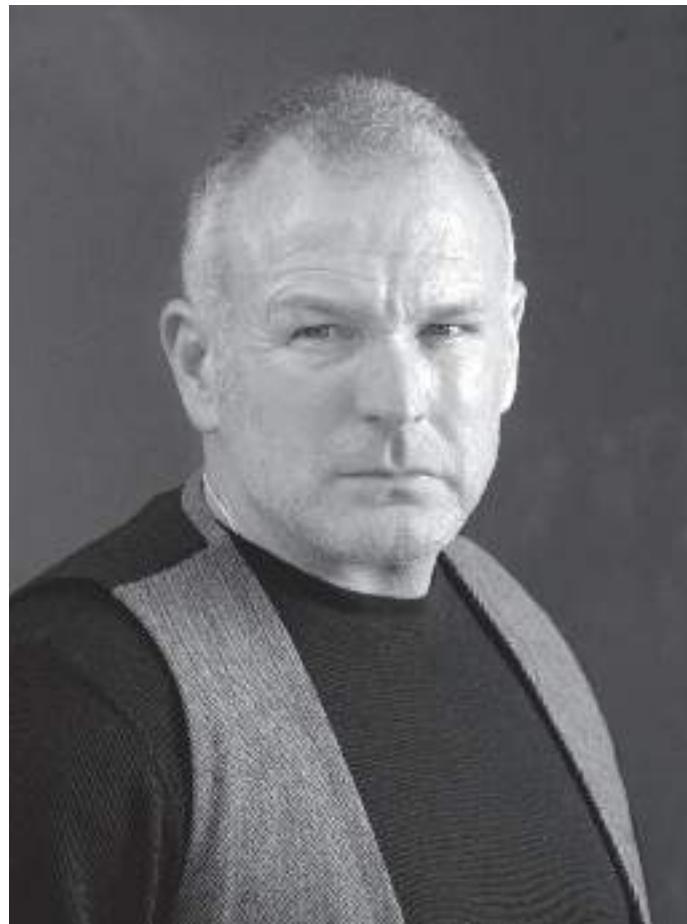
Goodman looks older than his 45 years. He's had a tough life. At 12, he quit school and was living on the streets. He sold drugs to survive and has been shot several times in deals gone bad. Goodman, who married young and had two boys, served nearly five years in prison for his criminal activity.

"Today is my 14th year of sobriety," he announces proudly at one of his favorite restaurants. "I started to going to AA meetings in prison. Then I relapsed once and stopped on Dec. 8, 1994. I am a guy who just can't drink."

Since he gave up drinking, Goodman has transformed himself from an ex-con to a noted character actor in such films as "The Last Castle," "Annapolis" and "Munich." And now, he can add screenwriter and feature director to his list of accomplishments.

His first film, "What Doesn't Kill You," a gritty, semi-autobiographical look at his life of crime starring Mark Ruffalo as his real counterpart, opened Friday for a one-week theatrical run to qualify for awards consideration. Ethan Hawke plays Paulie, a partner in crime of Ruffalo's character.

Ruffalo and Hawke play childhood friends who become involved in some unsavory activities. Like Goodman, Ruffalo's character, Brian, is arrested, goes to prison and struggles



LOS ANGELES TIMES

Brian Goodman quit drinking and transformed himself from an ex-con to a character actor.

with alcohol abuse. He begins to clean up his act, but Paulie keeps pulling him back toward a life of violence and self-destruction. Amanda Peet plays Brian's long-suffering wife and mother of his two children, and Goodman also stars as a south Boston gangster.

Goodman is still in contact with many of his cohorts from the old days. "I just mailed a money order to a friend of mine who is doing life (in prison). I never forget where I could be."

He wanted to be an actor since he saw "Brian's Song" with James Caan on TV in 1971.

"But I could never say it," he says. "In south Boston, saying you want to act is like saying

you want to wear tights." But when he was in the cellblock in Massachusetts, Goodman recalls telling a buddy that he wanted to be an actor some day. "I was dreaming out loud."

When he got out of prison, Goodman says he started robbing drug dealers. "I tried to fill this hole (in my heart) with money, and for the first time, it didn't work," he says. "I put the money in my friend's safe one day, and I sat on the bench, and started to cry like a baby. I said to myself, 'What are you going to do?' I didn't have any trade skills."

But fate intervened when he learned that there were auditions for a low-budget film, "South-

ie," starring Donnie Wahlberg. "That was my first audition," he says. "The first three auditions I was sent on, I got speaking roles. I was still on parole, though, and couldn't leave the state."

He began writing "What Doesn't Kill You" after reading the script for "Southie." "I was bored and thought maybe I can write one of these things," he explains. "I started writing on this 37-cent notepad. I just kept writing. My sister typed it for me."

He moved to Los Angeles in 1998, found an acting coach and took the script to Wahlberg.

"Donnie said, 'We got to make this movie,'" he says. So Wahlberg (who appears as a cop in "What Doesn't Kill You") and screenwriter-actor Paul T. Murray helped him with the script.

Goodman met producer Marc Frydman and director Rod Lurie, who produced "What Doesn't Kill You," when Frydman cast him in the Jeff Bridges movie "Scenes of the Crime." And then Lurie cast him in "The Last Castle," where Goodman met Ruffalo.

Goodman became fast friends with the actor. "We were going to make this a few years back (with Ruffalo), but then he got called in for 'In the Cut,'" Goodman says.

"What Doesn't Kill You" was set to be re-released in 2009 by the Yari Film Group, but its distribution division was forced into Chapter 11 bankruptcy last week. Now the movie is looking for another distributor, according to Lurie. Nevertheless,

Goodman, who shot the movie in just 23 days last winter in Boston, says he's proud of the film because he was able to stay true to his vision and his life. "I know nobody is going to be able to say that's not how it is," he says.

Ed McMahon, wife have no plans to move from home

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Ed McMahon can stay put. Publicist Howard Bragman confirmed that the TV icon and his wife have no plans to move from their home, which has been facing foreclosure for nine months. Bragman said he doesn't have details about the deal that's allowing the 85-year-old McMahon to stay, but added: "They ain't leaving."

Public records show there was a series of transfers of the loans last month on McMahon's house, which is in a hilltop gated community that's also home to Britney Spears.

A Southern California company, Foreclosure Trackers Inc., has taken credit for brokering the deal and say they plan to negotiate a better deal for McMahon, 85.

Robert Lee, the company's chief executive officer, said earlier this year that his aim was to prevent McMahon from having to move.

"I don't want their home," Lee



In this July 24, 2007 file photo, Ed McMahon arrives at the premiere of The Simpsons Movie in Los Angeles.

said. "I want to make sure the McMahons can keep their home."

Public records show Countrywide Financial Corp., which issued a default notice on McMahon's home earlier this year, transferred the loan to a company

called DCI Technology Holdings. A subsequent filing indicates the loan was transferred to a limited liability corporation recently established by a Northern California business lawyer, Peter Liebow. (Liebow has not returned calls seeking comment.)

While Foreclosure Trackers' name does not appear on the transfer documents, some of those familiar with the deal say Lee and the company acted as middlemen.

"Foreclosure Trackers was involved in helping the transaction between Countrywide and a third party," said Jumana Bauwens, a Countrywide spokeswoman.

She said the company no longer has any control over foreclosure proceedings. "We're happy for Mr. McMahon," she said.

The former "Tonight" show sidekick for Johnny Carson has faced a series of money problems since he broke his neck in a fall last March. He has been sued over unpaid loans and le-

gal fees for his daughter's divorce, and has sued a Los Angeles hospital that he claims failed to diagnose his broken neck and botched two surgeries.

For months, several people, including Lee and Donald Trump, have pledged to help McMahon and save his house.

Trump stepped aside from his bid to buy McMahon's home when Lee contacted him months ago and said he could work out a better offer, said Michael Cohen, an executive vice president with the Trump Organization and Trump's special counsel.

With the news this week that McMahon's home appeared safe, Cohen said Trump was satisfied.

"Mr. McMahon remains in his home," Cohen said. "Clearly the efforts of everybody paid off."

In a time of bleak financial news, Bragman expressed hope that the resolution to McMahon's situation served as a good omen. "We hope every other American in trouble has the same experience," he said.

Man who was dumped gets both support and suspicion

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
FROM UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

DEAR ABBY: I had trouble containing myself when I read the letter from "Mixed-Up in Missouri" (Sept. 21), the "nice guy" with a string of failed relationships because he is "too good to be true." Please let him know that he is truly a gem waiting to be discovered. He reminds me of my own "prince," whom I was finally able to find after a divorce, countless frogs, and 30 years of figuring out what I deserved.

Some women are scared of anything that is different, so when a man treats them well they question it to death. Believe me, I know. My husband and I married five weeks after we met because it just felt right. After 2 1/2 years of marriage, one son and another on the way, I have no regrets. My husband is the kind every woman should have. I would tell "Mixed-Up" that his time will come. Someone will cherish what he has to offer.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER IN TEXAS

DEAR HAPPILY: Thank you for sharing your hard-earned experience with my readers and me. I am pleased your marriage is working out, but I would not recommend that couples marry after knowing each other only five weeks. I advised "Mixed-Up" to widen his circle of acquaintances and fish in a different dating pool. Many readers wrote in to comment about his letter. Read on:



Dear Abby

DEAR ABBY: "Mixed-Up in Missouri" said he treated his wife and girlfriends like queens. Perhaps he wasn't telling you everything. I married a man who treated me like a queen too—until I did or said something he didn't like. You see, everything he did for me came with a price.

Yes, he did nice things for me, but he also expected me to reciprocate in specific ways that he never really explained. If I failed to do something the way he wanted, or with the "wrong" attitude, he would throw it in my face. He did not act out of kindness, but for what he could get in return. He never understood why I eventually quit trying to please him, and "got rid" of me after 14 years of marriage. It turned out to be the biggest favor he ever did for me.

GLAD TO BE FREE IN INDIANA

DEAR ABBY: I dated many of these "too good be true" guys. I cannot stress to you how boring it is to "reign supreme" in a relationship with someone who wants only to do what I want to do, go where I want to go, eat what I want to eat, etc. Even the flowers and gifts don't make up for it.

Women don't want gifts—we want a man, a partner. In a real relationship I want to work as a team, experience new things and hear new perspectives. It's time for "Mixed-Up" to take a look at what he is actually bringing to the table—or what he's not.

TRACY IN ILLINOIS

DEAR ABBY: I have no desire to be elevated to the status of royalty. What I'm looking for is someone who shares some of my interests, respects my strengths and can help me improve upon my weaknesses—someone who functions just as well on his own as I do.

"Mixed-Up" is young yet—probably too young to have gotten married. He needs to start looking at women as partners and not pedestal perchers. I'm sure some women are swept away by his courtship technique initially, but after a while, pedestals become cold and lonely. Women who are damaged or bitter will be distrustful. And secure, well-adjusted women will simply not be interested.

NOBODY'S QUEEN IN N.J.

DEAR ABBY: There's a saying about men who treat women like princesses. If you worship the ground she walks on, the ground she walks on will be YOU.

NORM IN HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIF.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Abby shares more than 100 of her favorite recipes in two booklets: "Abby's Favorite Recipes" and "More Favorite Recipes by Dear Abby." Send a business-size, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for \$12 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby—Cookbooklet Set, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Postage is included in price.)

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Saints make Lions first 0-15 team in NFL history



DETROIT (AP)—The Detroit Lions own a dubious piece of NFL history—with perhaps more on the way.

Detroit became the first 0-15 team ever when it was routed 42-7 by the New Orleans Saints on Sunday. The Lions will try to avoid a perfectly awful season in the finale at Green Bay, where they haven't won since 1991.

Drew Brees threw for 351 yards and two touchdowns after four Saints ran for scores in the first half. Brees stayed in the game with a 35-point lead late in the fourth quarter to move closer to Dan Marino's single-season record for yards passing. He needs 402 at home against Carolina to break Marino's record of 5,084 set in 1984.

The Lions were outscored by a combined 176 points at home this season, smashing the previous record of 146 set by the 1981 Colts. Only the expansion Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1976 went through a season winless in the modern era, but it was a 14-game schedule.

Brees connected with Marques Colston twice in the third quarter for a 42-7 lead and a single-season franchise record of 29 touchdowns. The Saints also set a team record with their 50th TD of the year.

Giants 34, Panthers 28

At East Rutherford, Derrick Ward ran for career-best 215 yards and set up Brandon Jacobs' winning 2-yard touchdown run with 9:57 left in overtime as the Super Bowl champion New York Giants earned the NFC's top playoff seed with a 34-28 comeback victory over the Carolina Panthers.

New York (12-3) forced the overtime when Jacobs plowed into the end zone from a yard out, and Eli Manning hit Dominik Hixon on a slant pattern for the tying 2-point conversion with 3:21 to play.

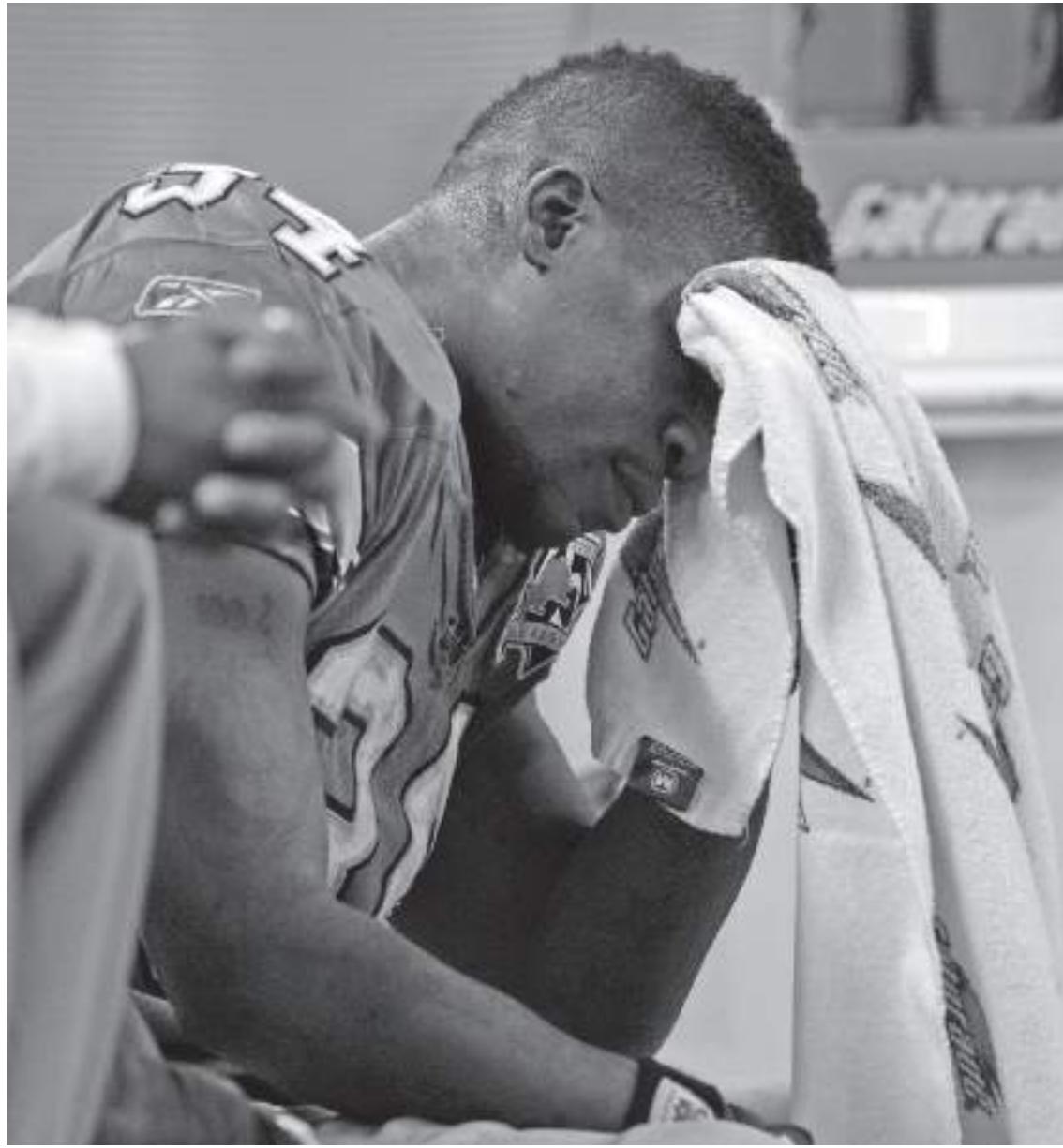
New York clinched a first-round bye earlier in the day when Atlanta beat Minnesota, but added the icing on this frosty night by beating Carolina (11-4) in the winner-take-all game for the NFC's top seed.

The loss spoiled record-tying four-touchdown performance by Panthers running back DeAngelo Williams, who gave Carolina a 28-20 lead with a 30-yard TD run 2 minutes into the final quarter. He also scored on runs of 13, 5 and 1 yards.

The Panthers, who have qualified for the playoffs, can clinch the NFC South and the No. 2 seed with a win at New Orleans next weekend.

Titans 31, Steelers 14

At Nashville, Tennessee, Kerry Collins threw for a touchdown, while Chris Johnson and LenDale White ran for a score apiece as the Titans routed the Steelers in a showdown of the AFC's best teams. Tennessee clinched the



AP

Detroit Lions running back Kevin Smith sits on the bench in the fourth quarter of an NFL football game against the New Orleans Saints in Detroit, Sunday, Dec. 21, 2008.

No. 1 seed and home-field advantage throughout the playoffs.

The Titans improved the NFL's best record to 13-2 with their 15th win in 17 games. But they were coming off a loss to Houston and were up against the NFL's stingiest defense.

They snapped back well, ending the Steelers' five-game winning streak.

Falcons 24, Vikings 17

At Minneapolis, the Falcons' stunning turnaround season will roll on into the playoffs.

Matt Ryan threw for a touchdown and Justin Blalock recovered a fumble in the end zone for another score and the Vikings committed four turnovers as Atlanta clinched a postseason berth.

Michael Turner rushed for 70 yards and a touchdown for the Falcons (10-5), who were 4-12 a year ago and ended the season without a head coach or a franchise quarterback.

With Mike Smith calling the shots and Ryan's steady hand, the Falcons have that and so much more now.

The Vikings still have a shot at their first NFC North title, needing a Chicago loss in the last two weeks or a win over the New York Giants next week in the season finale. The Bears host Green Bay on Monday night, then play at Houston.

Bills 30, Broncos 23

At Denver, the Broncos blew an early 13-0 lead in the second

coldest game in Denver's history, setting up an all-or-nothing matchup against the Chargers next week for the division title.

The Broncos (8-7) led the Chargers (7-8) by three games with three to go, but now face the possibility of having led the West by themselves from opening weekend through Christmas with nothing to show for it.

The Chargers' win at Tampa Bay earlier in the day was blacked out at Invesco Field by Broncos coach Mike Shanahan, who didn't want his team's emotional edge affected by San Diego's fortunes.

Broncos quarterback Jay Cutler threw for 359 yards and broke Jake Plummer's franchise record with 4,210 yards for the season. But Kawika Mitchell's interception at the goal line when the Broncos were threatening for the tying touchdown with less than six minutes left is what Cutler will surely remember most about this game. □

The temperature at kickoff was 17 Fahrenheit (-8.33 Celsius).

Chargers 41, Buccaneers 24

At Tampa, Florida, Philip Rivers, the NFL's highest-rated passer, threw for 287 yards and four touchdowns, helping the Chargers keep their playoff hopes alive and deal a crushing blow to the Buccaneers' chances.

After their third straight win in what amounted to elimina-

tion games for a team that began the season with expectations of reaching the Super Bowl, San Diego (7-8) got the help it needed when Buffalo beat Denver.

Tampa Bay (9-6), which lost its first home game and has dropped three straight, could have clinched at least an NFC wild-card spot with a win and some outside help. Instead, the Bucs' day ended with quarterback Jeff Garcia's nose bledied and hoping three other contenders—Atlanta, Philadelphia and Dallas—falter the rest of the way.

Dolphins 38, Chiefs 31

At Kansas City, in the coldest game they ever played, the Dolphins stayed hot.

Chad Pennington threw three touchdown passes, continuing one of the most remarkable comeback seasons in NFL history in temperatures that plunged into single digits. With their fourth victory in a row and eighth in nine games, the Dolphins (10-5) can clinch the AFC East next week just one year after finishing a league-worst 1-15. All they'll have to do is beat the Jets in the Meadowlands.

The temperature at kickoff was 10 Fahrenheit (-12.22 Celsius), with a wind chill of minus-12. Previously, the coldest game the Dolphins ever played was 14 F (-10 Celsius) at Foxboro, Massachusetts, on Dec.

11, 1977.

It was the second-coldest game at Arrowhead Stadium, where the Chiefs (2-13) concluded the home portion of what's certain to be the worst season in the 49-year history of the franchise. They were 1-7 at Arrowhead.

The loss, coming six days after the abrupt resignation of general manager Carl Peterson, would seem to cast the future of coach Herm Edwards in even greater doubt.

A Miami defense that hadn't yielded a touchdown in three weeks gave up four TDs and a season-high 492 yards to the Chiefs.

Patriots 47, Cardinals 7

At Foxborough, Massachusetts, New England crushed Arizona with a blizzard of points on a snow-covered field. It won't keep the Cardinals out of the playoffs. And it might not be enough to get the Patriots in.

The Patriots pressured Kurt Warner into one of his worst

games in 11 pro seasons as he threw for just 30 yards.

New England clinched a better record than Arizona—which is 8-7, but 2-6 against winning teams—but could miss the playoffs for the first time in six years. The Patriots began the day tied for the AFC East lead with Miami and the New York Jets.

Baltimore (10-5) has the tiebreaker edge over the Patriots for the conference's one available wild-card spot.

If the Patriots win at Buffalo next Sunday, they still may become the second team to miss the postseason with an 11-5 record since the NFL adopted a 16-game schedule in 1978.

49ers 17, Rams 16

At St. Louis, Isaac Bruce reached a pair of milestones in a late-game flurry in his old stadium. Both helped the San Francisco 49ers in an improbable comeback win.

Bruce became the fifth player to reach 1,000 catches on a 3-yard touchdown grab with 4:12 to go and passed Tim Brown for second on the career yards receiving list on the 49ers' go-ahead drive.

The Rams (2-13) squandered a 10-point lead for the second straight week, failing to capitalize on four turnovers and four sacks while losing their ninth in a row.

Bengals 14, Browns 0

At Cleveland, Cedric Benson rushed for a career-high 171

yards and Leon Hall returned one of his three interceptions 50 yards for a touchdown to help the Bengals get their first road win this season.

After losing their first eight games, the Bengals (3-11-1) have won two in a row for the first time since the final two games of 2007.

Cleveland (4-11) has lost five straight and hasn't scored an offensive TD since running back Jerome Harrison's 73-yard sprint on Nov. 17 at Buffalo—nearly 21 quarters ago.

Seahawks 13, Jets 3

At Seattle, Maurice Morris had a season-high 116 yards and John Carlson scored the only touchdown on a short pass from backup Seneca Wallace as the lowly Seahawks ended New York's stay atop the AFC East.

Mike Holmgren, Brett Favre's confidant and former coach in Green Bay, went out a winner in his final home game as the leader in Seattle—largely because Favre came up short when the Jets (9-6) needed him most.

New York must now beat AFC East co-leading Miami at home next week, while relying on losses for either New England or Baltimore, also 10-5, to get in the playoffs.

Redskins 10, Eagles 3

At Landover, Washington stymied an Eagles team that was averaging close to 33 points during a three-game winning streak, and Clinton Portis scored his first touchdown in eight weeks in a win that offered the Redskins a consolation prize on the day they were mathematically eliminated from the postseason.

The Redskins (8-7) had lost three in a row and five of six after a 6-2 start.

Meanwhile, the Eagles (8-6-1) were left ruining a chance to stay ahead of Dallas and Tampa Bay (both 9-6) with one week to play. Philadelphia has a must-win game at home against Dallas in next week's season finale, and still could fall short of the playoffs with a victory.

Raiders 27, Texans 17

At Oakland, California, Johnnie Lee Higgins caught a 29-yard touchdown pass and then returned a punt 80 yards for another score in the third quarter to give the Raiders a win in their final home game of the season for the first time since 2002. The rest of the year has been much of the same losing for Oakland (4-11), which became the first team in NFL history to drop at least 11 games for six straight seasons.

The Texans (7-8) had won four straight for the first time in team history and were hoping for their first winning season. But Houston could generate little against the lowly Raiders.

Rondo helps Celtics tie record, win 18th straight



BOSTON (AP)—Rajon Rondo scored 18 of his 26 points in the third quarter to help the Boston Celtics tie a franchise record with their 18th straight win, beating the New York Knicks 124-105 Sunday night.

The win improved Boston's record to 26-2, matching the NBA mark for the best start by a team with two losses. The Celtics can break the record at home against the Philadelphia 76ers on Tuesday night.

Coincidentally, Boston tied the Knicks and 76ers at 26-2. New York did it in 1969-70 and Philadelphia in 1966-67. Both teams went on to win NBA titles.

Boston's 1981-82 team also won 18 consecutive games.

Ray Allen had 18 points, Paul Pierce 17, Kevin Garnett 12 and Kendrick Perkins 12 for the Celtics.

Quentin Richardson led the Knicks with 29 points and Nate Robinson had 23. Chris Duhon added 20 with 10 assists.

New York lost its fourth straight and eighth in a row to Boston.

The Knicks trailed 69-63 before Rondo took advantage of some poor interior defense, driving past defenders—mostly Duhon and Richardson—for layups and all of Boston's points in a 10-4 run that put the Celtics ahead by 12.

The Celtics led 98-87 after three and scored the first seven of the final quarter, turning the game into a rout when Brian Scalabrine's 3 made it 105-87 with 10:28 to play.

Despite a chance to tie the franchise winning streak and match the NBA's best start, the crowd seemed a bit subdued in the early going, likely due to a pair of snowstorms that blanketed the area with over a foot of snow since Friday.

Just like Friday, when the building was nearly full during the first storm, the TD Banknorth Garden was mostly filled during a day of snow and freezing rain.

While the Celtics pounded the ball inside early, scoring 12 en route to a 24-8 lead 5:53 into the opening quarter, the Knicks seemed intent on shooting 3s.

The Knicks went 10-for-18 from beyond the arc in the opening 24 minutes, with Richardson hitting 4-of-7.



AP

Boston Celtics' Rajon Rondo (9) shoots against New York Knicks' Nate Robinson (4), as Al Harrington (7) looks on in the third quarter of an NBA basketball game Sunday, Dec. 21, 2008, in Boston.

Former Pittsburgh Pirates pitcher Dock Ellis dies at 63

By BEN WALKER
AP BASEBALL WRITER



Dock Ellis, who infamously claimed he pitched a no-hitter for Pittsburgh under the influence of LSD and later fiercely spoke out against drug and alcohol addiction, died Friday. He was 63.

Ellis died in California from a liver ailment, former agent Tom Reich said.

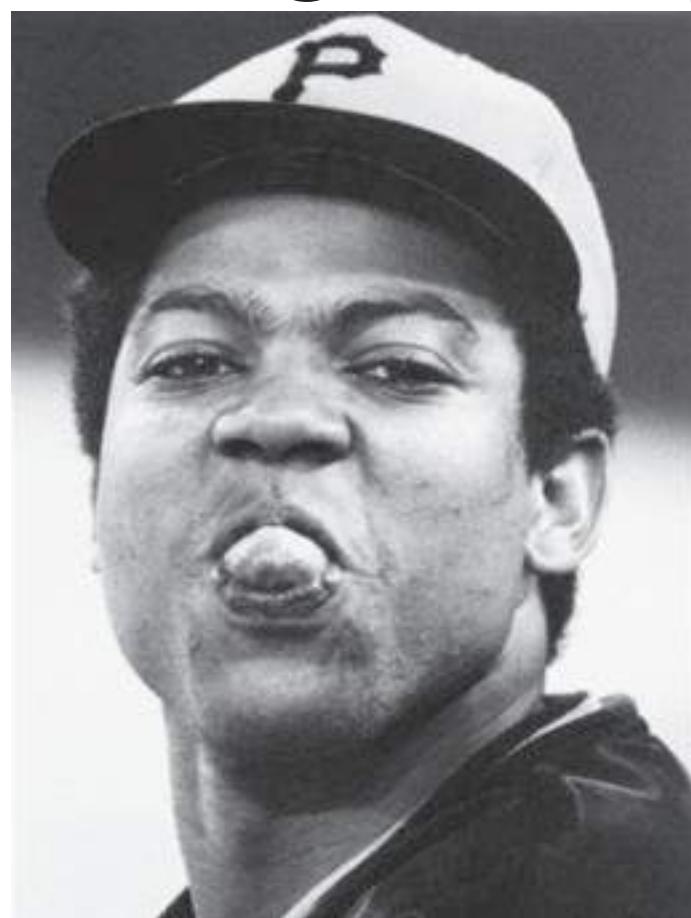
"I've been in this business for 40 years and there was never a more standup guy," Reich said.

Ellis' death was first reported by ESPN.com.

Ellis went 138-119 with a 3.46 ERA from 1968-79, spending most of his career with the Pirates. He went 19-9 in 1971 when Pittsburgh won the World Series, and made his only All-Star appearance that summer—and what a show it was. Ellis was tagged for one of the most memorable home runs in All-Star history, Reggie Jackson's monster shot off the light tower at Tiger Stadium.

In 1970, Ellis overcame eight walks to pitch a no-hitter in the first game of a doubleheader at San Diego. Several years after he retired, the right-hander said he was high on LSD during the victory.

At a time when drugs, race and other issues in American society were colliding with baseball, Ellis often was at the forefront. He spoke his mind and stood by what he said while playing with



Pittsburgh Pirates Pitcher Dock Ellis expresses his sentiments about West Division Winners San Francisco Giants, after their win, Thursday, in this Oct. 1, 1971 file photo taken in Philadelphia, Pa.

Angels withdraw offer to slugger Teixeira

LOS ANGELES (AP)—The Los Angeles Angels have pulled their eight-year offer to Mark Teixeira and will no longer go after the first baseman.

Team spokesman Tim Mead confirmed Sunday the Angels have withdrawn their offer and are "out of the Mark Teixeira derby." The team made its offer, reportedly worth about \$160 million, during the winter meetings in Las Vegas earlier this month.

The Red Sox said last week that they "are not going to be a factor" in signing the 28-year-old Maryland native. Washington and Baltimore have expressed interest in Teixeira.

The Angels obtained Teixeira from the Atlanta Braves in late July. Playing in a combined 157 games with the Angels and Braves, Teixeira had 33 homers and 121 RBIs along with a career-best .308 average.

Cavaliers 102, Thunder 91

At Oklahoma City, LeBron James scored 31 points, Mo Williams added 20 and Cleveland finished a four-game road trip.

James eclipsed 30 points for the fourth straight game. Kevin Durant scored 26 for the Thunder. Russell Westbrook added 22 points and matched his career-high with 11 assists and Jeff Green scored 16 points and grabbed 10 rebounds.

Delonte West hit his first five shots and finished with 18 points against his former team as Cleveland won for the 22nd time in 24 games to extend the best start in team history.

Mavericks 97, Wizards 86

At Washington, Jason Terry scored 25 points and Dirk Nowitzki had 23 to help Dallas send the Washington Wizards to their sixth straight loss.

Washington tied a 42-year-old franchise record for worst start—the 1966-67 Baltimore Bullets also started 4-21.

The win was Dallas' 13th in 17, even though the Mavericks made only five of 30 3-pointers two nights after a 24-point loss at New Jersey.

Hawks 85, Pistons 78

At Atlanta, Mike Bibby put an end to Detroit's domination of the Hawks, scoring a season-high 27 points.

Detroit trailed by 18 points early in the second half before launching a steady comeback in the matchup of second-place teams.

The Pistons cut the lead to 80-76 on a basket by Rasheed Wallace with 2:30 remaining, but Bibby answered with a jumper.

The Pistons swept the four-game series with the Hawks last season, but each of the games came before Atlanta acquired Bibby from Sacramento on Feb. 16. Detroit had won 12 of the last 16 in Atlanta.

Johnson had 19 points and seven assists. Al Horford added 11 points and 11 rebounds and Josh Smith also had 11 points for Atlanta. Rodney Stuckey and Wallace each had 20 points for Detroit.

CC Sabathia gets \$9M signing bonus

NEW YORK (AP)—CC Sabathia will receive \$9.5 million from the New York Yankees before he throws his first official pitch in pinstripes.

His \$161 million, seven-year contract includes a \$9 million signing bonus, according to details obtained Friday by The Associated Press. By the time the Yankees open at Baltimore on April 6, he already will have received \$6 million of that bonus plus \$3.5 million of next year's salary.

This is how it works:

-The signing bonus is payable in three equal installments by Dec. 31 and by March 1 and July 31 next year.

-He will get a \$14 million salary in 2009 and \$23 million in each of the final six seasons of the deal, the largest contract ever for a pitcher both in total dollars and average salary.

-While most players are paid semimonthly during the six months of the regular season, Sabathia's salary will be paid in semimonthly installments over all 12 months of the year. That means he will have received six payments of \$583,333 before the opener.

Even Sabathia admitted this week that "with the economy being the way it is ... the huge amount of money, it was, you know, pretty crazy."

"But that's our game, I guess," he said.

Sabathia's deal calls for him to get a suite on road trips, a provision also in the contracts of several other major leaguers. He can void the contract after the 2011 season and file for free agency.

New York finalized Sabathia's contract on Thursday along with pitcher A.J. Burnett's \$82.5 million, six-year agreement. Burnett receives annual salaries of \$16.5 million and, like Sabathia, has a no-trade provision.

With the agreements, New York has committed about \$159 million to 14 players for next year. That includes pitcher Andrew Brackman and infielder Juan Miranda, who don't figure to be on the major league roster.

New York still hopes to re-sign Andy Pettitte and has several players eligible for salary arbitration: pitchers Chien-Ming Wang and Brian Bruney, and outfielders Melky Cabrera and Xavier Nady.

Rare weekend King and Queen of the Lanes set

Capital Bowling Center will host a rare weekend King and Queen of the Lanes Bowling Tournament for its December edition, according to Saipan Bowling Association treasurer Ross Zapanta.

"For this month only, the tournament will be on a Saturday and a Sunday, Dec. 27 and 28, because most of the leagues are cancelled due to the holidays. The Prince and Princess of the Lanes will also be on a Saturday," he said.

Saturday's competition will start at 6pm, while the Budweiser roll-off on Sunday begins at 4pm. Registration starts 30 minutes prior to game time. Awarding ceremonies immediately follow the end of competition on Sunday.

The competition is exclusive for SBA members with participants limited to the first 60 entries for each day.

Members have the option to bowl on the Saturday or Sunday, or on both days, provided that the \$15 entry fee is paid. Bowlers who did not bowl on Saturday will be given priority for the Sunday shift. Only the higher score



MARK RABAGO

December King and Queen of the Lanes Bowling Tournament will be held this Saturday and Sunday instead of the usual Sunday-Monday schedule.

will count for the tournament. All participants have to pay the \$15 SBA annual membership fee.

The champion is guaranteed \$100 in prize money but it could go up to as

much \$150 depending on the number of participants. Women participants will only have separate prizes if there are at least 10 entries.

Youth bowlers (12 to 19 years old, not bowling in any leagues or averaging less than 170 in any league), meanwhile, will duke it out in the Bing Energy Drink Prince and Princess of the Lanes Tenpin Bowling Tournament in Day 1 of the monthly competition. Entry fee is \$10 for the Bing Energy Drink Prince and Princess of the Lanes.

After being sponsor-less for the whole of 2007, the Saipan Bowling Association's monthly King and Queen of the Lanes Tenpin Bowling Tournament as well as its season-ending bowlfest has secured the help of MARPAC for this year's competition.

The Budweiser King and Queen of the Lanes Tournament aims to crown 12 monthly champions through the course of the year.

For early registration and payment, see or contact Ross or Gigi Zapanta at 288-5627 or email zapanta@pticom.com. (Mark Rabago)

THEA

From Page 28

before her title tiff against Oxnevad, lost to her top seeded foe, 0-6, 0-6.

The 13-year-old Minor advanced to the championship game after beating Annie Shannon for the second straight time in the semis, 7-6, 7-5.

Minor was unseeded, again in the girls' 14-and-under singles and advanced to the Round of 16 after crushing No. 11 pick Nadia Coombes, 6-2, 7-6.

The CNMI netter continued stunning seeded opponents when she downed the No. 2 ranked Alexandra Oliver of Mairangi Bay in the quarterfinals, 6-4, 7-5.

Despite losing in the singles finals, Thea's mother, Joy, was satisfied with her daughter's performance in New Zealand, especially in Auckland.

"She saved the best for last. She

started slow in Waikato, picked up her game in Poverty, and then gave her best in Auckland. Beating the No. 2 seed was an achievement and playing against the No. 1 seed improved her game," Joy said.

She added that she liked the kind of focus her daughter had shown in New Zealand.

"They've been traveling from one place to another. From Poverty Bay, they traveled by land to Auckland for seven hours and after only a few minutes of rest, Thea played right away and made a strong showing in those games," the elder Minor added.

Minor also played in the girls' 16-and-under, won two matches before bowing to Oxnevad, 1-6, 2-6, in the Round of 16.

Joining Minor in Auckland were fellow CNMI netter Christian Miller and Rafael Jones, who were both first timers in New Zealand. Thea was part of the ITF Pacific Oceania Team that was

in New Zealand last year.

Miller competed in the 128-man draw of the boys' 14-and-under singles, drew a bye in the first round before losing to Nathaniel Humphrey in the round of 64, 9-7.

Jones also drew a bye in the first round of the same event, won his Round of 64 match, beating James Valentine, 9-5, before bowing to No. 8 seed Joe Collins in the Round of 32, 0-6, 4-6.

The CNMI bets are returning to Saipan tomorrow morning.

Minor is bringing home three doubles title and three runner-up finishes. She never had a shutout in the three tournaments in New Zealand.

Minor and Kamoe won the girls' 14-and-under doubles in Waikato and were runner-ups in the girls' 16-and-under.

In Poverty Bay, Minor and Kamoe also topped the girls' 14-and-under doubles. The CNMI bet played in the girls' 14-and-under singles final, but lost to Kamoe in the title match.

ing the Krystal Perfect Spotters, 4-1. D'Pirates Huwa pulled off a 4-2 decision against USSP Fotten Palau in the other game in Week 1.

In Week 2, the Home Boys defeated D'Pirates Huwa, 4-1, and complete a sweep with a shutout triumph over Coral Reef Barracuda.

The Home Boys also prevailed in the Obyan Division of the 8-Ball league.

Winners in the Bud Cup and the Budweiser Open 8-Ball League will be feted in an awards ceremony on Jan. 4 at Charley's Cabaret at Pacific Islands Club.

DOCOMO

From Page 28

Senen Pangilinan, Joey Lucido, John Ricafort, Rowell Mariano, Erwin Gomez, and Jerry Soriano.

Topping the Bud Cup allowed the Hustlers to redeem themselves from failing to win the Budweiser Open 8-Ball League.

The Hustlers ruled the 8-Ball league for three straight years, before the PTI Voyagers stopped the former's run this season.

SSC

From Page 28

confirmed their participation in the Guam meet, which will run from Dec. 27 and 28.

The list include siblings Grace and Andrew Kimball, Emma and Abigail Martinsen, Blair Nicholls, Michael Moran, Lester Lapuz, and Victoria Chentsova.

Blasberg said he and co-coach Mike Villagomez are sorting out the events that SSC swimmers will be joining in, but the club and its swimmers are up-

beat about the meet.

"The swimmers are very anxious for the Guam meet. This will be their biggest meet so far this season and they're excited to see how much their times have improved with the months of training," Blasberg said in an email to *Saipan Tribune*.

SSC swimmers are coming off personal best performances during last month's All Schools swim meet.

After the meet early November, SSC swimmers continued their regular practice at the Kan Pacific Swimming Pool in Marpi to prepare for the Guam tournament.

SSC bets train every day with weekdays practices running from 4pm to 6pm. Saturday's sessions are from 7am to 9am.

This weekend, SSC will go up against swimmers various swim clubs of host Guam.

The two-day meet will also have swimmers from Tsunami Swimming Center Saipan.

Tsunami Saipan is sending five swimmers with veteran tanker Rezne Wong leading the team.

Joining him are Shin and Kensuke Kimura, Kai Staal, and Marystar Welch.

TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

NBA STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	26	2	.929	-
New Jersey	13	13	.500	12
Philadelphia	12	15	.444	13 1/2
New York	11	16	.407	14 1/2
Toronto	10	17	.370	15 1/2

Southeast Division

Orlando	21	6	.778	-
Atlanta	17	10	.630	4
Miami	14	12	.538	6 1/2
Charlotte	9	19	.321	12 1/2
Washington	4	21	.160	16

Central Division

Cleveland	23	4	.852	-
Detroit	14	11	.560	8
Chicago	13	14	.481	10
Milwaukee	13	16	.448	11
Indiana	10	17	.370	13

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

New Orleans	16	7	.696	-
Houston	18	9	.667	-
San Antonio	16	10	.615	1 1/2
Dallas	15	11	.577	2 1/2
Memphis	9	17	.346	8 1/2

Northwest Division

Denver	17	10	.630	-
Portland	17	10	.630	-
Utah	17	12	.586	1
Minnesota	4	22	.154	12 1/2
Oklahoma City	3	25	.107	14 1/2

Pacific Division

L.A. Lakers	21	5	.808	-
Phoenix	16	11	.593	5 1/2
L.A. Clippers	8	19	.296	13 1/2
Golden State	8	20	.286	14
Sacramento	7	21	.250	15

Yesterday's Games

Atlanta 85, Detroit 78
Boston 124, New York 105
Dallas 97, Washington 86
Cleveland 102, Oklahoma City 91

NFL STANDINGS

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Miami	10	5	0	.667	321	300
New England	10	5	0	.667	397	309
N.Y. Jets	9	6	0	.600	388	332
Buffalo	7	8	0	.467	336	329

South

SGA Ace of Aces Tournament

Photos by ROSELYN B. MONROYO



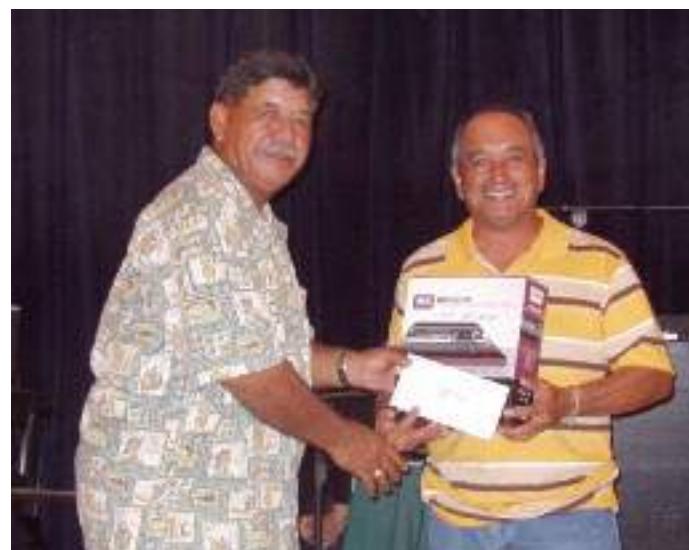
SGA president Martin Sablan, left, congratulates 2008 Ace of Aces winner Joe Demapan during the awards ceremony and SGA Christmas Party in Pacific Islands Club's Charley's Cabaret.



SGA members join Ace of Aces champion Joe Demapan at the stage during the awards rites.



SGA Ace of Aces runner-up Norbert Sablan, right.



SGA Ace of Aces third placer Tony Deleon Guerrero.



SGA Ace of Aces fourth placer Joe I. Sablan.



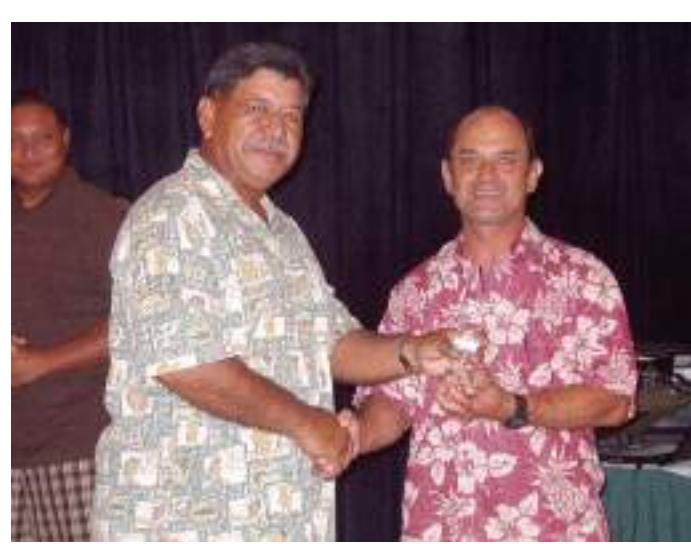
SGA Ace of Aces fifth placer Frances Sablan.



SGA Ace of Aces sixth placer Art I. Deleon Guerrero.



SGA December Ace Jess Castro.



SGA April Ace Larry I. Deleon Guerrero.



SGA May Ace Carl Hocog.



SGA October Ace Steve Balakrishna.



Rondo helps Celtics tie record, win 18th straight

Rajon Rondo scored 18 of his 26 points in the third quarter to help the Boston Celtics tie a franchise record with their 18th straight win, beating the New York Knicks 124-105 Sunday night.

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Saipan Tribune Sports

28 TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2008

Saints make Lions first O-15 team in NFL history

The Detroit Lions own a dubious piece of NFL history—with perhaps more on the way. Detroit became

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SAIPAN TRIBUNE

Thea caps NZ stint in style

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

CNMI junior tennis player Thea Minor capped her impressive return trip to New Zealand with another doubles crown and a finals appearance in a singles event. Minor competed in the 2008 Auckland Christmas Tournament at the Scarbro Tennis Centre in Nicholson

Park, Mt. Eden, Auckland and it was her last stop after playing in Waikato and Poverty Bay.

The tested partnership of Minor and Tarani Kamoe of Fiji gave ITF Pacific Oceania Touring Team its third doubles championship in New Zealand this year.

The unseeded tandem of Minor and Kamoe stunned the No. 2 seed pair of Georgina and Kirsty Hayr of Royal Oak, Auckland in the girls' 14-and-under doubles finals in straight sets, 6-1, 6-1.

Kamoe and Minor started their uphill climb en route to their third doubles title with a 9-0 shutout win over No. 8 seed Charlotte Findlay and Kate Stevens of Remuera in the Round of 16.

In the quarterfinals, Minor and Kamoe were pitted against the unseeded pair of Jade Lewis and Sarah Reid with the Pacific Oceania duo taking a 9-3 triumph.

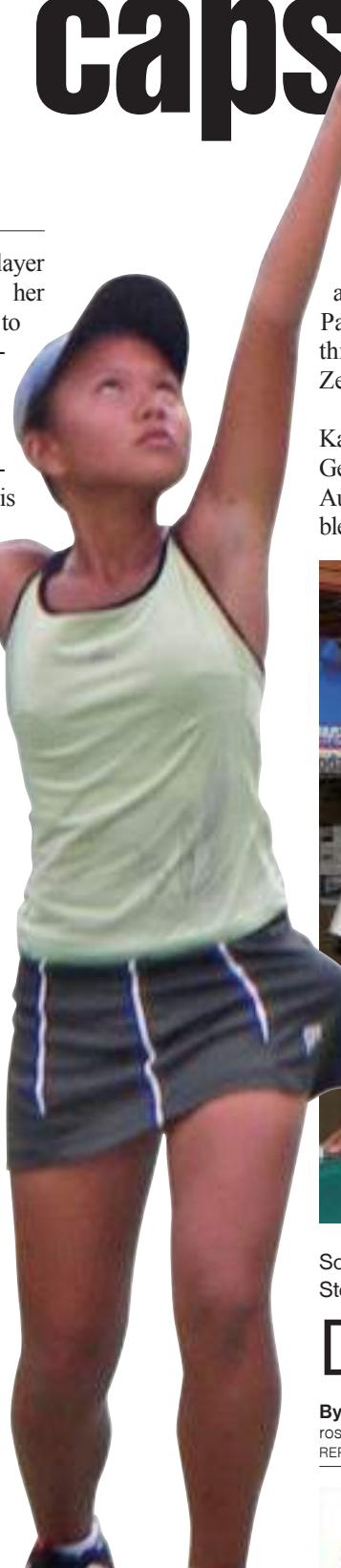
Minor and Kamoe then caught a big-

ger fish in the No. 1 seed tandem of Mia Middleton and Lucia Young cruising to a 6-1, 6-3 win in the semis.

The Pacific Oceania pair picked up where they left off with another sweep of its second-ranked foes.

In the girls' 14-and-under singles, Minor also made it to the title match before bowing to the much taller and much stronger Louise Oxnevad of Queensland in the finals.

Minor, who played four games a day
See THEA on Page 26



ROSELYN B. MONROYO
An Evenflow player serves during the second round match in the Rocball league this month at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

Rocball semis cast complete

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER



The semifinals cast in the 2008-2009 World Organized Rocball Community League is complete after four more teams were shown the exit door over the weekend at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

Making it to the Final Four are Okies, Ghasias Brothers, Evenflow, and Fanians. Taking an early Christmas vacation and joining the Naturals are Islanders, Soul Rebels, No Mercy, and FSM Rebels.

The FSM Rebels entered last weekend's games with a 0-2 record and finished the second round still winless after back-to-back losses on Friday and Saturday.

No Mercy handed the FSM Rebels their third loss in a row with the former nailing a juiced-out win, 69-32, Friday. On Saturday, Evenflow eliminated the FSM Rebels via a 64-42 triumph.

See ROCBALL on Page 26

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
Thea Minor serves in one of the local tournaments. She will return to Saipan from New Zealand tomorrow bringing home three doubles titles.

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER



Krystal Docomo Hustlers continued their domination of the Saipan Billiards Association Budweiser Cup after claiming their fourth championship in a row Tuesday night.

The Hustlers were undefeated in the

Agingan Division of the Bud Cup for three weeks capping their fourth consecutive title with a 4-2 victory over Godfather's Rock Steady.

The eventual champions opened their title bid in the Bud Cup with a 4-2 victory over their fiercest rival PTI Voyagers.

In Week 2, the Hustlers showed no mercy over Islanders Rent A Car cruising to a 4-0 shutout win.

The Hustlers picked up where it left off in the third and last week of the competition with a two-point win over Rock Steady.

Two other teams joined the Agingan Division of the Bud Cup with USSP Wat-Ever and Coral Reef Shark Attack included on the list.

The champion team was composed of Robert Sanciangco, James Lee,

See DOCOMO on Page 26

Docomo Hustlers secure fourth Bud Cup plum

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Some members of the Krystal Docomo Hustlers pose for a group photo during a break in their game against Godfather's Rock Steady Tuesday night at Godfather's Bar.



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SSC tankers set to join Guam meet

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER



Saipan Swim Club bets will close out the 2008 season with a stint in the Guam International Swim Meet at the Hagatna Swimming Pool this weekend.

SSC coach Michael Blasberg said so far eight SSC swimmers have

See SSC on Page 26



ROSELYN B. ROSELYN
Grace Kimball in the 100m freestyle swim during last month's All Schools meet at the Kan Pacific Swimming Pool. Kimbal and seven other SSC swimmers will be competing in Guam this weekend.